

THE INDIAN SPIRIT  
AND  
THE WORLD'S FUTURE

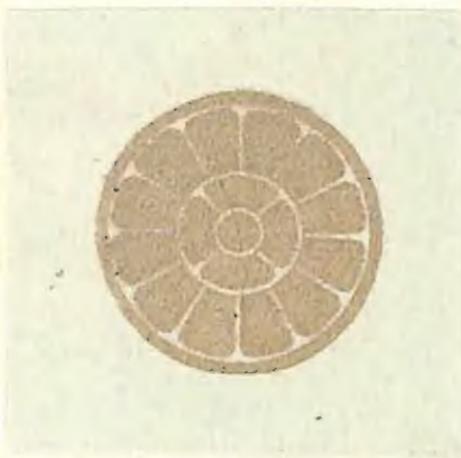
K. D. SETHNA

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**The Ideal Flag for India**

*(See page 43)*

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K. D. SETHNA

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## Preface

THE essays collected here are cullings, retouched in a few places, from the editorial contributions, either openly avowed or under the pen-name "Libra", to the fortnightly review—recently converted into a monthly—*Mother India*. The opening words of the manifesto in the first number ran: "We are here to answer a grave need of the times. This country has gained independence, but it has not found its proper line of life. There is a welter of ideologies and our minds are divided. A host of parties has sprung up, each with a different aim. In the clash of parties the right destiny of India is forgotten." For nearly five years *Mother India* has carried on its work of throwing light on the true Indian spirit and its role in the creation of a new world. From the material standpoint the work has been one of unique tenacity, for *Mother India* is the only contemporary journal which has intellectually and spiritually gone from strength to strength over a long period of time without practically any advertisement-revenue! And this record achievement is due to the idealism inspired by the greatest intellectual and spiritual figure of our age, Sri Aurobindo, whose many-sided world-vision was sought to be reflected in various ways in *Mother India*. Symbolic of that inspiration was the

launching of this periodical on February 21 in 1949, the seventy-first birthday of Sri Aurobindo's co-worker for the regeneration of mankind, the radiant personality who is known in the Pondicherry Ashram as the Mother.

Originally the publication did not intend to stand aloof from political controversies, as it does now after Sri Aurobindo's passing. But its attitude to politics—both national and international—was an uncommon one. "In the hubbub of political slogans", said the manifesto, "we bring a standard that is non-political. Though we shall never stop touching politics as also we shall never stop touching all that constitutes man's many-faceted life, we are not a political party. And our standard of judgment, by being essentially non-political and above all parties, will conduce to an impartiality, a freedom, a wideness, a depth of vision."

What this standard of judgment was and how it was organically connected with the national genius that we termed Mother India will be made clear in the course of the essays in this volume, though purely political problems form no part of their subject-matter. In general it may be summed up by saying that in every field of activity the aim was to criticise whatever militated against humanity's instinct of an evolving divinity within itself and to give the utmost constructive help to all that encouraged this instinct. To quote the manifesto again: "The Godhead secret within man is the truth of man and most keenly the truth of the Indian nation, the truth that has to be lived out as much as possible. Not for

any lesser ideal do we launch our paper and only this highest ideal we have in mind when we take as our motto the ancient cry: 'Great is Truth and it shall prevail'."

Did this mean that we must be religious zealots, fanatics of a creed? Certainly not. That would have gone against the national genius itself of India the home of a widely synthesising spirituality. Perhaps an indication of what was meant can be most tellingly, even though indirectly, given by citing some passages from an editorial not included in the present collection, which discussed the issue of choosing between Stalin and Truman:

"The world at present is broadly divided between those who support Stalinism and those who do not. Over against Stalinism there is no particular 'ism' built round an individual. America is, of course, the biggest power outside Russia; but the anti-Stalinists cannot be labelled as Trumanists, except by way of a highly significant pun which would distinguish between 'True Man' and 'False Man'.

"Opposed to Stalinism are various democracies, each with its own kind of constitution. America and England and France cannot be said to have exactly the same type of government. Nor can they be said to have the same sort of national mind....But all of them are bound together by their recognition that Stalinism puts the False Man against the True Man, an obstruction in the path of the deepest nature *homo sapiens* tends to evolve and manifest.

"The key-importance of the creative individual in the evolutionary process, the presence of a secret Godhead who can inspire and enlighten the consciousness of the individual—these two beliefs or intuitions are the authentic stamp of *homo sapiens*. On the basis of them the perfect world is to be built. Stalinism is relentlessly pitted against these intuitions. The Communist sociology is an instrument of the False Man because it is imbued with a rigid negation of them and not because it is a campaign to fight Capitalism. Of course, there have been atheistic movements outside the Communist camp, but they were mostly initiated by the desire to break down sectarian bigotry, cramping mechanical orthodoxy, superstitious and authoritarian obscurantism: in short, they were an extremist recoil from a too narrow and self-interested form of the religious and spiritual sense and from a refusal to combine religion and spirituality with the sense of that individual freedom which is implicit in the belief that the individual has a key-importance in evolution. Such atheistic movements were a sort of paradoxical help to *homo sapiens*' true trend and always served ultimately to stress the need of the race to live by its instinct of a more luminous and more potent Consciousness than the limited human reason which is inclined to cut up Reality into bits and stiffen into what Edmond Taylor calls 'Nothing-but-ism'. They were not like the Stalinist denial of the Divine and would have been fiercely opposed to the Totalitarian State."

A large liberality and a love of freedom were integral

part of the ideal served by *Mother India*. And yet there was no leaning towards a doctrine of stark individualism: the divinity within, which was the truth to be served, would at the same time that it allowed diverse development provide the uniting and harmonising status and dynamis rendering such a leaning impossible, for it would stand for the manifestation of the one infinite Self of selves, the single all-integrating Mother-power to which the cosmos owes its life and its evolutionary *élan*. Egoistic fissiparousness was never to be encouraged; the quest for the organised whole, for the collective existence, was deemed indispensable. But what was envisaged in the quest was a unity without uniformity, a concord without monotony and always the movement was towards the inner as the foundation of the outer.

Here an important point must be made explicit. *Mother India* has striven to drive it home again and again. Though the inner is to be the foundation of the outer, the latter is not to be conceived as a superstructure of poor materials and paltry dimensions. Whatever leads to a conception of this kind is not completely in keeping with the instinct of divinity. Among the forces that today work to dim this instinct, perhaps the most dangerous is the idea assiduously spread that it is unworldly and impoverishes earth-life. We have to admit that there has been a spiritual trend in India and elsewhere to look too much beyond the world and renounce earth-life. But it is not the only trend, and spirituality can be dynamic as so often spirituality has been in India as well as elsewhere. In

fact, to make it dynamic as never before, with the help of a new principle and power of consciousness, is the whole effort of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. The full flowering, the full richness of life on earth is their objective.

The world at the present moment is in no less need than the world when our Cultural Review started its career, of some concrete hold on profound spiritual realities, strengthened and directed by masters of mysticism and Yoga who do not merely argue about them but cultivate the vision and experience of them in the widest manner and put the vision and experience into relation with all issues and, in particular, cultural ones—that is to say, issues basic to the human situation. The recognition of this need has led readers of *Mother India* to ask for republication in book-form of editorial articles dealing in the main, directly or indirectly, with the bearing of the Aurobindonian vision and experience on such issues—and centrally on those aspects of them that are burning matter in the life of the country in which God-lovers and God-knowers have been most abundant but which today is passing through a dangerous cultural crisis whose right resolution is of the utmost importance to the world's future.

K. D. SETHNA

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## Indian Nationalism at Its Truest

THE word "Nationalism" is very much in the air of an awakened and resurgent Asia. But, apart from opposition to colonial rule by the West as well as to the spread of Moscow-dictated Communism, what light exactly may be considered as thrown by India on this important word? We need to ask ourselves what Indian Nationalism is. For, on the answer will depend our own future and the role we shall play in world-history.

Indian Nationalism is not a simple phenomenon: it has many meanings and directions. All who have fired the Indian heart and fought for the independence of our country have contributed some special colour to this Nationalism. But if we wish to drive to its truest significance we must pick out the figure owing to whom the national awakening first took place in its most marked and conscious form.

Nationalism, to be the truest, must be not only a movement against a foreign rule but also an expression of a nation's authentic temperament. At times the authentic temperament is seen best when everything touched by foreign influences is cut away and the typical power of the nation's consciousness is found in its stark nakedness. It is in the nineteenth century that India began slowly to arise out of the decline into which she had fallen—the

decline whose one result was her defeat at the hands of foreign invaders and another the strong stamp put on her by the culture of those who held her in subjection. But the stir of the native consciousness was neither complete nor sufficiently dynamic. There were many imitative elements, apings of the West, and a general tendency to believe that a westernised India alone could be India resurgent and India competent to cope with the shackles imposed by imperialist England. Denuded altogether of westernisation the only Indian feature seemed the superstition-ridden illiteracy of the common peasant or at the best the stagnant though not uncultured religious conventionalism of the common pundit. Surely here was not any creative source: everything else seemed a cross between India and England, with the latter herself providing by her home tradition of democratic humanism the directive energy for the former's fight against her colonial policy.

*The Country's Very Soul in Pure Power*

Then a strange thing occurred. Out of a temple in which the Goddess Kali was worshipped by stagnant though not uncultured religious conventionalism there came a man who had all the outer look of representing superstition-ridden illiteracy. And yet he was as little the common peasant as he was the common pundit. He came with a religious message but it was something the pundit was utterly incapable of. He came with an absolute lack of education but it was something quite unlike the

ignorance of the peasant. Here was one altogether innocent of western formulas, one who seemed akin at the same time to the two specimens thought possible of sheer Indianness and who still was entirely different from them and carried a tremendous conquering creativity. Before him bowed down the finest flower of educated Bengal. In him the westernised Indians saw authentic India stand up, clear of every colour of the West, clear even of every tinge of what typical India appeared to be in that age—a representative was he of some hidden essence of the national being, the country's very soul in pure power. At one stroke the emergent Nationalism was made to recognise its central meaning and direction. The attractive veil of westernisation fell from the eyes, the feebleness of the country's decadence went out of the limbs and India knew what she was and grasped the essential energy of her own self.

Ramakrishna, the illiterate man from the temple of conventional Kali-worship, was a veritable colossus of mystical experience: in him direct and immediate realisation of the Divine Being reached an intensity and variety which made him a marvellous summing-up of the whole spiritual history of India, with a face carrying the first gleam of a new age of the human soul. He could neither read nor write English: not even a word of English could he understand. Bengali itself he could only speak: he had no schooling at all. All that he had was God: he could unite himself with the Supreme Omniscience, his heart's home was the Infinite, he lived constantly in the Eternal.

The Divine Being and the Divine Force that he called the Mother were a presence with him at all times—from deep within him, from near and far around him, from some absolute transcendence high above. His feelings were not of the ordinary emotional kind but radiant with the true spontaneous psyche which is an everlasting spark of the Supreme, a child of the World-Mother. His thoughts were not of the brain-mind but luminous with an intuitive perception which was in contact with the inward as well as the outward. Apparently ignorant but wise beyond measure, frail and helpless to an initial view yet a power-house that could move the world, poor and ascetic yet holding the thrill of the Beauty that is immortal, he sat day after day at Dakshineshwar with the most educated men of Calcutta about him together with simple village folk. And from his strange spiritual personality the true Indian Nationalism was born. For the first time came the awareness of what it was that had to be resurrected and put against the shallow vitalism from the West that was keeping India in chains or, at its most benevolent, bringing her up to be an artificially galvanised part of its own glittering scheme.

Of course, the Indian genius is not confined to spirituality pure and simple, not even to a many-sided spirituality to the exclusion of all other modes of being. The very fact that Ramakrishna's chosen instrument for world-work was Vivekananda, a complex passionate analytic mind, a highly cultured master of system and organisation, a richly endowed physical nature, shows that India

moves instinctively to grip earth no less than heaven. At least the intention of Ramakrishna was to reshape through Vivekananda the whole of the country's life in the light of God-realisation. But by embodying in his own figure a stark spirituality, as it were, he performed the catharsis that was most needed in the country's consciousness if accretions and superfluities, illusions and delusions, waste matter and foreign matter were to be swept off and prevented from obscuring and obstructing the growth of Indian Nationalism. The central *conditio sine qua non* stood out the most vividly and acted the most puissant by getting thus isolated.

### *The Four Types of Nationalism in India*

If it was the shock of sheer spirituality in the figure of Ramakrishna that gave birth to Indian Nationalism by kindling in the nation a consciousness of its own typical genius, we should do well to guard against satisfaction with any lesser type of nationalist aspiration. The type truly in consonance with the cathartic shock from Ramakrishna is summed up in the famous cry of Bankim's song, *Bande Mataram*—"I bow to you, O Mother". The movement is basically religious, it is towards the Divine—the country is viewed as a Goddess who is not only its collective soul but also a face and form of the World-Mother, the creatrix of the universe. When the innate turn of the nation is mystical, even the patriotic fervour can be directed only to the Divine Spirit, and unless the

country is felt as that Spirit's emanation this fervour will never fulfil the national life: such is the philosophy behind *Bande Mataram*. There is a second type of Nationalism which is not directly spiritual but charged with indigenous history. Since India's history cannot be separated from the spiritual quest, here also is a sense of the World-Mother just as in the first type indigenous history is ever alive, but the stress now falls less upon the Divine Presence than upon the particular face and form She assumes in the country's collective soul as felt in the traditional ideals and institutions, the characteristic customs and festivals,—in short, the whole historic consciousness. This Nationalism has the roots of its politics in the popular *dharma*. A third type is an ethical Nationalism in which certain moral doctrines are set up for the patriot's guidance, chiefly the doctrines of non-violence and ingenuousness. Patriotism which, for the second type, stands in need of no defence and aims first and foremost at the country's freedom and the expression of the country's historic nature and does not bind itself to rigid dogmas of method, patriotism which says "Swaraj is my birthright" and will not fight shy of violent revolution and effective secret strategy, is not acceptable. A particular brand of moral self-discipline deriving mainly from the Buddhist strand of our culture subsumes patriotism here, just as the mystic's *élan* takes it up in the *Bande Mataram* type; but there is a difference in that the latter has a wideness and a plasticity which has a keen tact of the moment wedded to loyalty to ideals, and, besides,

it looks for its inspiration towards a Light beyond the trenchant mind's temperamental ideals. Ethicism is surely not spurned by it, but there is little adherence to one or another fixed and exclusive dogma: a large nobility is sought after and the idealism is not averse to a variety in the means of action.

A fourth type that has developed both by sympathy with the third and by appreciation of the latter's effectiveness at certain junctures of the nationalist movement is one bringing a blend of the rationalistic mind which has had so much to say in the modern West. It cuts the ethical completely off from the mystical. The third type is never without a religious bent, though the bent is towards serving God by serving men in a way the mind suggests rather than towards calling down a more than mental Power to guide one in work for that Power amongst men. The fourth type is non-religious, wholly secular. The country is no face and form of the Supreme Divine: it is not even a collective soul that can be addressed as Mother, except metaphorically. It is only an aggregate of individuals, a mass of human creatures, a large group of people with common traditions and a common territory. This Nationalism need not lack patriotic fervour or an upshot of noble deed. But, however noble the secular nationalist may be, he is bound to be uncomfortably haunted by a division in his own Indianness: on one side the historic pull of a country deeply religious, if not always God-fearing, and on the other the doctrinaire drag of a rationalistic "realism". Also, the secular nationalist is bound

to come upon a limit to his effectiveness, for he will put himself at variance with the whole trend of India's development and he will have to make an attempt at jettisoning the most important part of the experience and thought embalmed in the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Gita, experience and thought which fundamentally make India Indian. The only advantage he brings is enfranchisement from superstitious orthodoxy, from narrow insularity of outlook—an openness to world-forces, a tendency to international vision. But this advantage is just as much compassed by a truly spiritual Nationalism: an inner largeness breaks through sectarianism as well as communalism, an intuitive capacity is there for seizing on the essentially progressive elements everywhere and assimilating the best of the Occident into the Orient. When it is the World-Mother that is worshipped, there can be no imprisonment in small formulas: the mind is wide open to the world. At the same time, no loss is suffered of the delightful *differentia* that constitutes nationhood, for the World-Mother is seen focussed as the single unifying soul of the motherland. It thus combines the quality of the second type of Nationalism with that of the fourth, while transcending both, and in that transcendence it resembles the third type but even beyond the latter it goes to the supra-ethical source of all ethics. Thus it combines the advantages of all the four types in a value higher than theirs.

This higher value not only answers most truly to the Indian genius and thereby promises to advance it the

best but also makes a power that can carry India to a future greater than any possible to other countries on the strength of their own Nationalism: it promises to place India in the van of the world as a leader in the evolution of consciousness from the human to the divine.

## How Shall We Grow in Greatness?

WITH the withdrawal of the British from India we got the feeling of a new life. There was a sense of bright beginnings, a sudden intensity of national consciousness as if we had just been born as a great country. Naturally, with freedom freshly won, we think of ourselves as a young people whose future is waiting to be moulded according to its heart's desires. And we are casting our eyes all around for examples and models to guide us in our endeavour to build a beautiful and prosperous India.

But let us not forget one basic fact. The feeling of youth that we have now is not due solely to our liberation from political bondage. No doubt, many hidden energies have found release by this liberation and their breaking forth is conducive to the sense of youth. Yet, when we reflect that we are the only nation in the world whose civilisation has continued alive for so many thousands of years, we cannot help wondering how after so long a history we can still feel young. Even the Chinese civilisation is more recent than ours. We go back and back into remote antiquity and we have come out into the living present with fundamentally the same consciousness travelling down the centuries. According to any computation we are extremely old and by now should feel utterly exhausted. The departure of the British from our shores should

have left us only with happy relief at being allowed a peaceful death. Instead, we are full of dreams and are willing to dance on the edge of a hundred precipices. How is it that a song is on our lips and the heart in us is leaping forward to gigantic trials and passioning for a dear and difficult greatness?

Strange indeed that our interminable past should hang on us so lightly. Some eternal child seems to be laughing within the land. And it is this eternal child's laughter and not the falling of political chains that is the true cause of the delightful stir of life with which we are filled today. The falling of the chains has only given a fine edge to a youthfulness that is the very essence of the Indian nation.

If we realise this we shall stop looking merely around for patterns on which to erect our future. Of course, all that is nobly or usefully modern in the world of which we are a part must be accepted with gusto. There is nothing anywhere too foreign for us to allow assimilation of its central truth and purpose. Indeed our own nature is such that we can absorb a host of alien things without losing our typical quality. India is not a drab unity of culture: she is multiform, so much so that sometimes she is mistaken for a colossal colourful confusion. There is really no confusion but a many-sidedness through which yet runs a single secret strain. Both in body and mind she is a subtle persistent identity in the midst of a myriad variations. The variations, however, are as important as the underlying theme and as constitutive of the true character of us and therefore we should not hesitate to take in

whatever in the modern scene draws our heart's genuine response. At the same time, in the light of the strange youthfulness that is our essence we should look back at our own history and attempt to understand how and why we are vigorously and hopefully what we are despite such a lengthy past trailing behind us.

Surely it is no accident that civilisations seeming equally rich and powerful as ours died and disappeared. There is only one view of the history of civilisations that can explain our survival and our youthfulness. It is the view put forth by Sri Aurobindo and formulable in no terms save the mystical. We must regard every nation, every large and distinguishable human collectivity, as a super-organism with a common body and mind. This super-organism, like the individual, passes through a cycle of birth, growth, adolescence, ripeness and decline. The decline generally ends in death. But there resides in the vast subtleties of the collective being of a people a power of self-renewal with the help of its inner life-idea. The inner life-idea is the key to a nation's psychology and is more tenacious than the outer form. If it is great and intense and the body is strong enough and the surface-mind plastic and adaptive without being loose or unstable, then the collective being can keep unimpaired through vicissitudes, even rise phoenixlike out of an apparent perishing and one cycle will evolve into another and many cycles run their course before the final collapse. Certain of the ancient civilisations had this kind of continuity and resurrection. But even they could not last indefinitely.

For, the inner life-idea itself of a super-organism is only a projection of the authentic soul-principle behind, which is meant to serve as a vehicle of the eternal Spirit whose manifestation in time is the whole universe. The cosmic Self or Virat, as the Rishis called it, acting through its particularised representative, the soul-principle, is the true source and support of the inner life-idea of the collective being, as it is of the individual. And if this source and support is not sufficiently contacted in consciousness, the eternal is never brought into the temporal and ultimately comes dissolution or a fusion into other races.

But when there is a constant look into the Inmost, a persistent pressure upon the deepest and widest Self, a people acquires the secret of perpetual life-renewal and never ages, no matter how many millenniums pass, what foreign invasions interfere with its physical expression and what defects and decadences set in as a result of its own folly. Even death may threaten again and again, but every time a renascence occurs and the wrinkles straighten out, the stiff limbs recover healthy resilient tissue, the crust of dull habit and stifling conservative restraint breaks to reveal an enterprising and creative consciousness that was never moribund within. A people living not only with a keen and independent psychological stress rather than with a merely refined and superficially mentalised animal urge, a people living also in the experience of its profound soul-principle and thereby in the presence of Virat, the infinite Self of the cosmos seeking its own

highest manifestation through human history, such a people never dies and is everlastingly young.

India is the one outstanding instance of a never-dying ever-resurgent collectivity. And the sooner she throws off the cloud of scepticism put by her recent intercourse with Europe upon so many of her intelligentsia, and quickens to her own own profundities and sees as the Soul of her soul the supreme Godhead, the Divine World-Mother, the more apt will she be to use her acutely felt youthfulness today for genuine growth in greatness and for carrying to a still more glorious height than in the past the wonder of her perpetually young civilisation.

## **Our Ancient Wisdom and Its Genuine Revival**

THERE is at present, because of many causes, a general decline of values and a general confusion of mind all over the earth. In India this state of affairs has a critical significance obtaining nowhere else. Not that the Indians are in comparison with other peoples more demoralised or distracted. But India has been in history the home of the immensest aspiration and the intensest search after the Good, the Beautiful and the True. The dimming of the fire in the hearts of her inhabitants and the paling of the light in their minds are, therefore, the gravest of tragedies and most to be fought against. For, if Indians can bring forth the real genius of their country the world's degeneration will be halted: the hope of the future is in the renaissance and resurgence of essential India. And all the more powerful will be her influence because her genius is not only the typical idealist of the Divine but also a multi-mooded idealist, holding something of all national souls, functioning with an assimilative capacity which makes her as diverse in expression as she is single in motive. She can be all things to all men and so her uplifting force will be everywhere the most creative. And today even her inherent omni-effectivity is rendered more concentrated because, as a result of a long and pervasive impress

on her by the Western mind through her past British rulers, she is a meeting-ground of the East and the West, and the consciousness with which she works is profoundly Asian with yet a strong European colour. In rising victorious over the tide of decadence and debasement now sweeping across the earth she will epitomise in every respect the entire humanity's victory.

### *False Ideas about Spirituality*

But how shall we defeat this dangerous tide? Or, to put it more positively, how shall we grow in spirituality? Paradoxically the answer is: "Not only by overcoming all that has been looked upon as unspiritual but also by getting beyond what at the present day we take to be spiritual." The fact is that our current ideas about spirituality are inadequate and the inadequacy is itself a portion of the harm wrought by the dangerous tide we have to defeat. We talk of India's ancient wisdom, but we conceive it in terms that do it scant justice. So when we think of giving a new vitality, a contemporary life, to this wisdom we go no further than morality and religion. We never stop to ask: What is meant by India's ancient wisdom? Surely the most pointed answer is: the Upani-shads and the Gita. There are various interpretations of these scriptures, but no interpretation can have any value if it denies that these scriptures put before us a life of direct concrete experience of the Eternal, the Infinite, the Divine. This experience must be distinguished from the

merely moral frame of mind. One can be a great mystic, a great Yogi, as well as a highly moral person. But to be a practitioner of a moral life—however that may be conceived—does not necessarily make one a great mystic, a great Yogi. To be a knower of Brahman, Atman, Ishwara and let that supra-intellectual knowledge issue in a life lived in the light of a more-than-human consciousness is something far greater than to be a moralist following certain set principles of conduct by means of will-power and fellow-feeling. The moral life in itself can be a fine thing, but it cannot be compared in greatness to the mystical life—the life of a Krishna, a Chaitanya, a Mirabai, a Ramakrishna, a Vivekananda. Nor can we deny that it is the mystical life, the Yogic spirituality, that is the aim and ideal of the Upanishads and the Gita, the vibrant luminous essence of India's ancient wisdom.

When we add religion to morality we do bring in something more that is valuable, but mere religion cannot be put on a par with God-realisation. Religion at its best is a mental and emotional acceptance of the Eternal, the Infinite, the Divine. It can be a good preparation for the truly spiritual life, just as the practice of moral virtues can. But to be religious, no matter how highly, is not the same thing as to know the unitive life, the state of inner union with a more-than-human, a divine reality that brings a light, a bliss, a power, a love the purely mental and emotional acceptance of God can never compass. To have faith in God and even to listen to an "inner voice" is to encourage and practise the ordinary

religious temper and the ordinary moral conscience. A man of unusual calibre may encourage and practise these things in an unusual way, but they still remain, for all their intensification, within the domain of ordinary morality and religion and never cross the barrier between them and God-realisation.

Here a very common misuse of terms must be exposed. Much glib talk is going on about what is called Karma Yoga and about the high place given it in Indian scriptures. Popularly, Karma Yoga is supposed to be the doing of work with trust in God, a keen sense of duty and as much disinterestedness as possible. And the motive behind it is believed to be service of mankind. But one may inquire, "How does such action become Yoga?" Yoga means union—with the Divine; where is any room here for the unitive life? What we have in such action is yet a mixture of religion and morality. The true Karma Yogi is aflame with aspiration to unite with the Eternal and the Infinite. Service of mankind is only a means to an end for him: it is a means towards the mystical experience by enlarging one's scope of action beyond the small individual ego and, when the mystical experience is reached, service of mankind is a means to express it in the world. But this service is not the only means. And true Karma Yoga is done fundamentally by a threefold process: (1) there is a deeply devoted inner offering of one's actions to the Supreme Lord—a constant remembrance and consecration; (2) there is an inner

detachment not only from the fruit of one's actions but also from the actions themselves, an ever-increasing detachment until the infinite desireless impersonal peace of the Atman, the one World-Self that is an ever-silent Witness or Watcher, is attained and a spontaneous superhuman disinterestedness becomes possible; (3) there is, through this attainment and through complete surrender of one's nature-parts to the Lord, the Ishwara, the transmission of a divine dynamism, a superb World-Will from beyond the world, in all one's actions. God-realisation is the essence of Karma Yoga as of all other Yogas.

Without this God-realisation a man cannot give a new vitality, a contemporary life, to India's ancient wisdom—for he will not at all embody that wisdom at its purest and profoundest. This is not to refuse greatness to him, but it is not the greatness ancient India upheld as the top reach of the human soul. If India has anything to give humanity at present, it would be that wisdom in a form suitable and applicable to modern needs, that wisdom with a further development of its potency in certain directions. But in the absence of that wisdom the greatness one may achieve in oneself and induce in others is certainly never what ancient India considered the highest achievement in life and what modern India in tune with her inmost being could charge with appropriate new values and offer as the highest achievement.

*World-events and Spirituality*

Of course, all men cannot be Yogis in the full sense. But there must be a clear recognition of what genuinely constitutes the Indian ideal and in some way or other the ordinary existence must be brought into touch with it. Also, there must be whole-hearted acknowledgment of the actualisation of the ideal in those who have dedicated themselves for years to it. And towards these rare souls the mind of the nation must turn more and more. On the other hand, we must take care not to allow the Godward aspiration to end in a total neglect of earth. Earth's concerns are part of the scheme of things and the supreme Creative Force has not produced either an inexplicable illusion or an incomprehensible blunder in setting up the tremendous cosmos within which life agonises and exults, strives and falls and rises, presses forward as though some mysterious perfection urged it from behind and allured it from beyond. If by spirituality we understand a renunciation of the world's various calls and an impoverishment of life to the bare minimum we diminish in a different way its significance as much as we do when we take it to connote nothing else than morality and religion. Spirituality is at the same time a direct going of the human to the Divine and a direct coming of the Divine to the human.

If we Indians are to march in the van of the world and fulfil a mission which no other people can accomplish, we must feel that our genius is a dynamic world-trans-

forming spirituality which lives in a concrete contact and communion with a Perfect Being, Consciousness, Power and Bliss. All events and movements must be evaluated by reference to one standard: Do they, however remotely, tend towards the increase of such spirituality? The phrase, "however remotely," has some importance. For, all happenings do not have an easily perceptible connection with the Spiritual Truth. There are plenty of intellectual questions, social issues, political problems, economic situations that seem far away from matters mystical. The apparent far-away-ness should not lead us to regard them as irrelevant and to decide them with considerations within a narrow and isolated sphere. If the Divine is the centre of things there can be nothing on even the remotest periphery without an invisible radius running out towards it. We must find the radius and discern in the peripheral object the point at which contact is made or refused. The point is difficult to fix, but it is always there and certain broad indications can help us. The Divine has three simultaneous poises of being: the transcendent, the universal, the individual. The point of contact with the transcendent Divine is in general distinguishable by the sense of freedom, the sense of the inexpressible beyond formulas, the sense of the absolute perfection that puts "a yonder to all ends" while holding for each term its legitimate climax and consummation. The universal Divine is suggested generally by the sense of wideness and equality, the sense of unity-in-multiplicity, the sense of a greatly

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diversified yet persistent order. The general sign of the individual Divine is the sense of plastic form, the sense of adventurous variation without losing balance, the sense of numerous initiatives that compete and yet avoid mutual destruction. We must develop insight enough to mark the Divine at general play in any one of the poises or in a combination of more than one or in all at once, and according to the strength in which there is the play and according to the measure in which the threefold integrality is approached we must pass judgment. Of course, things are never to be taken at their surface value, many an undesirable force masquerades under attractive guises. Also, nothing should be studied in disparate sections—a whole view must be taken so that all the sections fall into their proper places and the complete nature of a force emerges. The labour of discovering whether there is or there is not a point of contact, however subtle, with the spiritual goal of mankind calls for intellectual no less than intuitive examination. To that labour we must pledge ourselves and put no limits to the field which is to be examined.

## Our Real National Anthem

OUT of all the fatuities with which modern India is infested, the most egregious is the long drawn-out discussion on the choice of a national anthem. The two songs that have been pitted against each other are really like two worlds apart and it is supreme lack of insight to set them up as equal candidates for election posing us a most perplexing problem. Once we understand, first, the prerequisites of the ideal national anthem and, secondly, the living associations and potencies of Bankim Chandra's *Bande Mataram* on the one hand and Tagore's *Jana Gana Mana* on the other, there cannot remain the slightest doubt that nothing except *Bande Mataram* can be the creative cry and the sustaining call on the lips of resurgent India.

We are often told that the prime consideration is that a national anthem should be suitable for collective singing, that it should have an effective orchestration. But these are, for all their importance, purely technical points. And woe betide the nation which appoints a committee of technicians to decide its anthem! Orchestral skill has certainly to be brought into play and a popular song which ultimately fails to be made suitable for collective singing will never get accepted. But such a song exists only in the imagination; the very fact that a song has been popular

implies that it has possibilities of collective and orchestral treatment. The right kind of treatment may not be easy to come by; yet to say that there is a fundamental defect in the popular song, rendering the right kind impossible, is to indulge in extreme partisanship for a rival ditty and in gross underestimation of a country's musical talent: already we have more than one excellent notation of *Bande Mataram*, to balance that for which *Jana Gana Mana* has been commended. In the controversy about a national anthem, the prime consideration, where a popular song is concerned, can never be a technical one. We have to go down to its significance and its emotion, we have to look at its history and its impact on the times.

What would be the ideal national anthem? Most people would think immediately of the stirring language and music of *La Marseillaise*. If we look at the history of this song and its impact on the times, it will be seen to fulfil every demand we can stipulate: it appeared at the right psychological moment, expressed the precise mood of revolutionary France wanting to be a republic, and on its magnificent flood an entire country swept to liberation from century-old bondage. It is also intensely inspired—every word rings authentic and carries the high passion that filled both philosopher and commoner, the passion for man's erect and unobstructed growth. We cannot hope for a fierier strain packed more creatively with a whole nation's yearning for liberty, equality and fraternity. But, though from a political and social angle

it is the example *par excellence* of what a national anthem should be, it leaves certain wider and deeper needs unsatisfied.

### *The Reality of National Being*

The ideal national anthem must not only express the political and social man or even the complete self of thinking and feeling individuals composing a people, but also bring home to us the reality of national being. What is a nation? Of course, a nation must have certain common cultural features in all its geographical distributions and linguistic differentiations. These common features require for their complete crystallisation, so to speak, a well-defined territory, a distinguishable physical shape of the land in which they have emerged. Certain collective confrontations of momentous and perilous issues turn all the more concrete the common and widely prevalent traits of cultural consciousness held within marked boundaries of mountain and river and ocean. But if we stop with these definitions and believe that we have done with nationhood when we have applied them to an aggregate of individuals we shall be committing a folly to which the modern mind is excessively prone—the folly of regarding the diversity of existence as real and concrete and the underlying unity as merely conceptual and abstract. But a nation can never be an aggregate of individuals any more than a country is just a large piece of land. When we speak of India we are alive to the presence and power

of a single being whose outermost shell is the territorial expanse indicated on our maps and whose more subtle and plastic body is the collection of human beings living in that expanse and sharing and expressing certain cultural characteristics. But our too intellectual turn leads us to dismiss this awareness as a figurative mode of feeling: we declare that we are only practising patriotic personification and that there is no actual entity beyond the individuals inhabiting the land. But this is a patent self-deception. No patriot has ever fought and died for anything except a vast, moving and mighty supra-individual personality—a hidden Goddess, a gigantic Beloved, a great Mother. Especially as a great Mother this personality inspires him, for a country is felt as either fatherland or motherland and the latter aspect is the most intimately alive and commanding. Not in the cold dissecting rational mind but in the heart with its mysteries and profundities, its intuitions of the beyond, its inexplicable visions of the superhuman and the divine, the essence of patriotism, as of every other individual-transcending passion, lies. A patriot who does not stir to the call of the great Mother that is his country and that is the unifying force of the millions inhabiting it is an impotent imposter. Or else if one feels the tremendous Presence and yet intellectually denies it one is effective for various ends but the schism within him will always impair his effectiveness and his very triumphs will be unrounded and carry a proclivity to defeat.

*The Vital Value of Nationalism*

The ideal national anthem, therefore, brings out in full the reality of the single Being whose multiple expression is the myriads living in a country. And, mind you, it is the national Being and not just the Spirit of Man or the universal Spirit that is to be present in it. Nationalism has no meaning without this particularity. We may argue against the power of Nationalism, we may say that modern progressive thought minimises Nationalism in the hope of achieving a world-unity. But the very fact that we are talking of a national anthem implies the importance of the national Being. And the implication is perfectly justified. In point of fact, this Being is so far the only supra-individual entity that has concretely emerged in human consciousness. The sense of the Supreme Divine may be very strong in individuals, it may even be an effective force in certain human collectivities or nations, but not every collectivity or nation possesses it, whereas the sense of a *Britannia*, a *belle France*, a *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, a *Bharat Mata* is most vivid. Millions have lived and died for the national Being. Even avowed atheists are instinctively awake to it. Even the Russian Communists have a feeling of "Holy Russia," and if there will be a split in World Communism it will come, as portended in the case of Yugoslavia *versus* Russia, by way of an intense awareness of the distinct character of a national collectivity. Furthermore, not only is the national Being an already realised if not always intellectually acknowledged

entity, but also is it a valuable, an essential part of the scheme of human evolution. Neither the consciousness of the one Spirit of Man in all countries nor that of the universal Spirit should annul the consciousness of nationhood. The wonderful world around us and above us and within us is never a featureless and colourless unity: it is a one-in-many, a unity-in-diversity, and we should err as much by stressing the single and the uniform as by concentrating exclusively on the multifold and the various. Life is not necessarily divided and broken up by being myriad-aspected; it is made richer, more capable of self-expression, more free and fiery, provided the inner unity is not forgotten or erased. Just as the uniqueness of the individual must never be regimented out of existence but carefully woven into a social symphony, so too the uniqueness of the national collectivity must be cherished without setting it at odds with the rest of mankind. Every large human aggregate has its distinct qualities of culture that are precious and that could never emerge if the aggregate did not stand out in its own rights. Nationalism is vital to the full development of humanity. Consequently, no national anthem can be ideal unless it brings, however subtly and refinedly, to the forefront the typical national Being of a country: even if all humanity or all divinity be hymned, there must be in the face and figure of the invoked Spirit something clearly and fervently national.

*The Typical Genius of the Indian Nation*

When we say "national", we must not mean merely a vague image of the country's consciousness. There must be a powerful suggestion of the precise colour and shape of the country's culture. Aggressiveness and fanaticism are, of course, to be avoided, though not at all the martial mood which keeps the sword ready and the soul keen-edged to combat any attempt at physical conquest or psychological enslavement. The powerful suggestion that is desirable cannot wholly come without this mood of manly self-sanctity, this ardent defensive attitude. But such an attitude itself is not sufficient to give the needed force of national individuality. What must be articulated is the typical genius of a nation. Thus, England's genius is a practical dynamic expansive life-instinct, with a background of vague poetic idealism. France's genius is an ordering brilliant clarity of intellect allied with a warm and often tempestuous enthusiasm for personal rights. The genius of India is in the first place an intense mysticism deriving from an ineradicable intuition of the Godhead that is the All and even more than the All, a creatively emanating and manifesting Consciousness and Delight, and in the second place a richness of varied, complex, adventurous, even fantastic-seeming forms of existence which yet carries a certain stability and self-balance by being rooted in a spontaneous organic energy. Something quintessential of this genius must pervade any anthem that aims at being ideally national in India.

And here a point of considerable moment is the true meaning of Indianness.

When we speak of Indian spiritual culture expressing itself harmoniously with a varied vitality we mean the culture whose initial significances and original splendours are to be found in the Rig Veda and whose wide and luminous developments are in the Upanishads and the Gita and the Tantra and whose culmination and complete outburst of light we find today in the poetry and prose of Sri Aurobindo. This is not a narrow religion that cramps and divides: it is a profound synthesising multi-faceted movement of revelatory and transformative power not only expressed in inspired *sutra* or *sloka*, penetrating exposition or evocative exegesis, but also in the very stuff of the living consciousness and in the very gesture and action of the living body. Indian spiritual culture, true to the multiply-single Divinity of its vast intuition and experience and to the *élan* of its audacious diversely creative life-force, stands like a parliament of all faiths and philosophies, a federation of all ethical and social forms. No doubt, a few lines of growth have become rigidly assertive, but, in their exaggeration of some aspects out of the many that were natural to the Indian genius, they are not fundamental. Not these unplastic survivals of certain necessities called for by particular circumstances are what we mean by cultural Indianness. They conflict with the norms and forms set up by several religions. But the basic soul and shape of cultural Indianness can take into itself the uniqueness, the subtle nuance, of every

religion. This remarkable quality of it has been evident to the students, in the West no less than in the East, of its prolific scripture and literature. Hence Indian spiritual culture cannot be objected to as being sectarian. But, on the other hand, we should be de-nationalising it if we refused to admit whatever ideas or terms in it distinguished it from the Islamic, Christian, Jewish, Zoroastrian, Sikh, Jain or even Buddhist culture. It has, for all its catholicity, characteristics of its own, and these characteristics it must retain in one manner or another if it is to be in any valid sense Indian. Take away these characteristics and it ceases being what the world knows it to be. Expunge them from a national anthem which claims to be Indian and you have a general non-descript religious terminology, lacking in all national savour and drained of all distinguishable and dynamic vitality. The Godhead hailed must bring the light and colour and configuration of what the descendants of the Rishis have felt and seen. The feeling and seeing are, because of their essential catholicity of motive, really acceptable by even a person who though in India does not think and pray with a consciousness in direct tune with the typical Indian spirituality; but if anyone takes objection to them because of their non-Islamic, non-Christian, non-Jewish, non-Zoroastrian, non-Sikh, non-Jain and even non-Buddhist suggestion, then he fails to understand what ultimate India is and he is trying to rob her of all genuine cultural value and to suppress a national genius that is, from the mystical and metaphysical viewpoint, the most wonderful in

existence and, from the worldly and pragmatic viewpoint, no less wonderful by its wealth of varied creativeness and its capacity of almost unlimited organic assimilation. The concept of secularity prominent today in our Constitution must never encourage us to water down this genius: its function is discharged as soon as it ensures freedom of religious belief and ceremony, absence of bigotry, non-discrimination on communal grounds. Over-touchiness with regard to the minorities is a blunder no less serious than riding roughshod over them. As settled dwellers in this sub-continent they are to be granted equal civic and individual rights with the majority that is called Hindu; but for their sake the majority must never diminish the marvellous potentialities of cultural Indianness. The national anthem of India cannot be ideal without burning with historical India's own distinct beauty of worship together with her broad vision of the universal Divine. If it does not thus burn, the India whose representative utterance it claims to be is just an artificial construct and not a grandly alive entity: she will be just a gilded simulacrum and the sum-total of her history will be a cypher.

A last hint remains now to be given about the ideal national anthem for us. When a country's genius <sup>itself</sup> is cast in the mystical mould, when to be truly Indian is to be charged with an instinct of the Divine and a presence of the Eternal in a way not common to other nationalities, the ideal national anthem will hardly echo the essential nature if it sings of God as a Power separate

from the national Being rather than as having a core of identity with it. To draw everywhere a line, however faint, between the two and to suggest merely that God presides over or guides the Being that is India is to make the song miss the exquisite finishing touch that is the ever-so-little-more without which we are worlds away from truth and perfection. Our national Being, the Mother-Power whose children we are, must itself be visioned and voiced as ultimately the Supreme and the Eternal standing here in the evolving cosmos and in the process of time with the face and figure of our country's Soul but with all the glories of the Infinite Mystery suffusing them and spreading from them to the ends of the earth. Break up the core of direct identity and you at once muffle the master-tone of the anthem.

### *The Merits and Defects of "Jana Gana Mana"*

Let us proceed to ask: does Tagore's *Jana Gana Mana* fulfil the several *desiderata* we have mentioned? There is no denying its noble sentiment, poetic merit and musical charm. After all, it was the incomparable Rabindranath who composed it, and it has a fine accent of country-wide friendliness as much as of gentle devotion to God. We must dismiss at once the ludicrous charge that it is an eulogy of George V on the occasion of his visit to India or even the cunning accusation that it lends itself easily to the apotheosis of any particular Indian

deemed worthy of praise, say, Gandhi. The phrase running like a refrain through the whole poem "Thou dispenser of India's destiny"—cannot be interpreted in its context as signifying anything except God, for this dispenser is addressed also as "Eternal Charioteer". Nor must we allow ourselves to be misguided by the contention that, because *Jana Gana Mana* refers only to certain provinces and not to all, it is insufficiently national: the song is intended to be a hymn to the one God who is pictured as looking after and uniting the diverse races of India, and the geographical names thrown in are poetically suggestive of some of the physical and ethnological features of the country, no aim is there to make an exhaustive inventory of places and races: the aim is to give a notion of India in her broad and general entirety moving in rhythm to the will of the Lord. Yes, Tagore's piece has a fineness deserving respect. But has it the qualities that are wanted in the ideal national anthem for India?

Unfortunately it fails on every count. There is not the intense consciousness of India as a mighty supra-individual Being: the mention of the country or of the nation is on the purely ideative or nobly sentimental level; the deep heart has not felt the huge presence and the words are vacant of its intimate force. India the puissant and beloved Mother does not flame out of the poem. There is not even an apostrophe to her as the Mother. The one sentence which brings in the term runs in Tagore's own translation: "Thy mother-arms

were round her and thine eyes gazed upon her troubled face in sleepless love...." Here it is not India but God who is the Mother. This clinches the point that the poem is not directly an invocation of the national Being, much less does it visualise this Being in all its powerful particularity. As a result the ardour to preserve and defend it from losing that particularity is absent: the warrior and the hero are dumb in *Jana Gana Mana*. Neither does it embody the essence of historical India, the country that had created sublime scripture and royal epic and beautiful drama, gripped life with a happy inexhaustible versatility, built grandly in stone and wood, fashioned majestic institutions, cast the lines of harmonious polities and thrilled with the luminous colourful patterns of the careers of memorable men, the country that had grown a passionate pilgrim of both eternity and time and developed a flexible yet ineradicable individuality numerous centuries before Islam's crescent ever dawned on its farthest horizon. Where in *Jana Gana Mana* are the recognisable features of cultural Indianness? We have only a blurred beauty, a diffused light which can never serve to draw forth the deep *swabhava* of the national Being which has broken through all bonds and risen again with its world-unifying yet characteristically Indian face. Those two words, "Eternal Charioteer", are scarcely clear enough to stamp any vivid Indianness upon it: they make just a poetic image, they do not call up the figure of Sri Krishna who charioted Arjuna at the same time to triumph over his

enemies and to the Vision of the Cosmic Deity—the Vision that is itself so typically Indian. Throughout the poem we feel a disappointing though never undignified washing away of the fact that the force of unification cannot come by an assembled and outwardly constructed “universal religion” but only by plunging into the wide vibrating heart of the Indian spiritual consciousness which, behind all sectarian excrescences, holds in its multi-rhythmed rapture the secret of a spontaneous fundamental universality. To achieve lasting and natural unity of being we must not annul Indianness but be Indian in the central infinity-focussing sense and develop out of its ancient spiritual potencies a new vision that is no less recognisably Indian for all its modernism and secular State-idea. Lastly, *Jana Gana Mana* keeps a cleavage between the concept of India and the concept of the Divine, instead of making them converge and fuse: India here is only the country whose destiny is dispensed by God, she is collectively held to be separate from the Supreme in the phrase about the latter, “Thy finger points the path to all people,” and in the sentence about the former, “My country lay in a deathlike silence of swoon.” There is indeed a pervading suggestion that India has a spiritual aspiration and adventure, but it is not set aglow and her spiritual origin and destiny are not revealed with a flaming finality by making the Supreme shine out through her Soul.

*The Paramount Qualities of “Bande Mataram”*

All that *Jana Gana Mana*, despite its fineness, fails to convey is brought out with rare felicity in *Bande Mataram*. The unique union, as Sri Aurobindo puts it, of sweet-ness, simple directness and high poetic force in *Bande Mataram* is difficult to translate with absolute accuracy into English verse from the original Sanscrit interspersed with a few Bengali words. But the inspired drive of it is admirably caught in general in Sri Aurobindo's own rendering which is born of his having felt it in his very blood-stream during the days when he led the revolt of Bengal against foreign rule:

Mother, I bow to thee!  
 Rich with thy hurrying streams,  
 Bright with thy orchard gleams,  
 Cool with thy winds of delight,  
 Dark fields waving, Mother of might,  
 Mother free.  
 Glory of moonlight dreams,  
 Over thy branches and lordly streams,  
 Clad in thy blossoming trees,  
 Mother, giver of ease,  
 Laughing lew and sweet!  
 Mother, I kiss thy feet,  
 Speaker sweet and low!  
 Mother, to thee I bow.

Who hath said thou art weak in thy lands,  
When the swords flash out in twice seventy million  
hands

And seventy million voices roar  
Thy dreadful name from shore to shore?  
With many strengths who art mighty and stored,  
To thee, I call, Mother and Lord!  
Thou who savest, arise and save!  
To her I cry who ever her foemen drove  
Back from plain and sea  
And shook herself free.

Thou art wisdom, thou art law,  
Thou our heart, our soul, our breath,  
Thou the love divine, the awe  
In our hearts that conquers death.  
Thine the strength that nerves the arm,  
Thine the beauty, thine the charm,  
Every image made divine  
In our temples is but thine.

Thou art Durga, Lady and Queen,  
With her hands that strike and her swords of sheen.  
Thou art Lakshmi lotus-throned,  
And the Muse a hundred-toned.  
Pure and perfect without peer,  
Mother, lend thine ear.  
Rich with thy hurrying streams,  
Bright with thy orchard gleams,

Dark of hue, candid-fair  
 In thy soul, with jewelled hair  
 And the glorious smile divine,  
 Loveliest of all earthly lands,  
 Showering wealth from well-stored hands!  
 Mother, mother mine!  
 Mother sweet, I bow to thee,  
 Mother great and free!

Not a single demand in order to get the ideal national anthem for India is left unanswered here by a poetic language and rhythm that come with the mystical inevitability of what is called the *mantra*—the visionary word springing by some identification of the hidden poetic self with the deep heart of the thing to be uttered, and catching in the moment of identification the secret divine truth and reality which has figured forth that thing. Not only is each phrase replete with precise and necessary significance, but the various phrases form an unfolding scheme both artistically and philosophically satisfying, a three-stepped progression which, in a speech delivered thirty-one years ago in the grand square of the National School of Amraoti, Sri Aurobindo is reported to have explained. As with the individual, so with the nation, there are three sheaths or bodies—the gross or outer, the subtle or inner, the causal or higher. The first consists of the physical elements, the shape, the visible organic functioning. In Bankim Chandra's poem it is the rapid rivers and the glimmering orchards, the winds and the harvests

waving, the moon-magical nights in forest and on riverside. A transition from the outer body of the Nation-Mother to the inner is through the human populations, the warrior men who are the physical instruments of the fine frenzy of freedom that is hers. Their teeming vitality is the cry of independence she sends forth from the inner to the outer—the inner that is a formation of beautiful disciplined powers, an inspired energy, a pure passion, an illumined thought, a righteous will, an aesthetics enchanting and refining. This subtle sheath of her being bears hints of a still greater mode of her existence and by those hints the supra-individual and national self of her mingles, in our enthusiasms as well as in our meditations, with all the symbols of the Infinite and the Eternal our religious nature instals everywhere in our land. That still greater mode is the prime creative archimage, at once single and many-aspected, whose evolving expression is the vast world with its nations and peoples. Cause and controller from its transcendental status, it is the Divine Truth of all formulated being, the ever-living supreme Personality whose power and bliss and knowledge are the perfection towards which we aspire in this country of ours when we love so vehemently the soil sanctified by hero and saint and seer and when we fling ourselves so happily into the service of the majestic and maternal Presence that we feel to be the indivisible India stretched in a myriad harmonious moods across space and time.

The revelatory vision and the mantric vibration distinguishing *Bande Mataram* throw *Jana Gana Mana*

entirely into the shade. And it is no wonder that not Tagore's but Bankim's song has been the motive-force of the whole struggle for India's freedom. Until it burned and quivered in the hearts of our patriots and rose like a prayer and incantation on their lips, the country was striving with an obscure sense of its own greatness: there was a vagueness, a lukewarmness, a fear: we were overawed by the material prowess and pomp of our foreign rulers and our efforts to find our true selves were spoiled by either an unthinking imitation of the West or else a defensive anti-Western conservatism. We had not struck upon the master-key to the problem of national existence. Then, out of a book that had been neglected when it first appeared, the music of *Bande Mataram* rang into the ambiguously agitated air of the nation's reawakening consciousness. Sri Aurobindo was at that time the political guru of Bengal. He realised at once the creative energy packed into this poem. With a gesture as of an ultimate world-secret found at last, he scattered the words of Bankim Chandra all over idealistic Bengal from whose "seventy million voices" that are rightly celebrated in the poem they spread to Gujarat and Maharashtra and beyond. In his own life he incarnated the presence of the mighty Mother with her aura of mystical consciousness. Under the spell of this presence a giant determination and zest took birth in the entire land, beginning a movement whose goal was bound to be independence. No sacrifice was too exacting, no suffering too poignant to be endured, not death itself could terrify. Laughing

and singing, the patriots fought and served and died. Through all the long years during which the struggle for swaraj went on, *Bande Mataram* stimulated and supported the peoples of India, instilling into them a hope and a strength beyond the human. It is the one cry that has made modern Indian history; not political speeches, but this magical strain breaking through Bankim Chandra from the inmost recesses of resurgent India's heart and interfused by Sri Aurobindo with India's mind and life as the true national anthem, brought us, in 1947, on the fifteenth of August which was also the seventy-fifth birthday of Sri Aurobindo, our political liberation. To put such a saviour-song on any other footing than that of national anthem is to be disloyal to the Power that has given us a new birth. To overlook the fact that it has been a saviour-song because it is ideally the national anthem of India is to set ourselves out of tune with the glorious future calling to our glorious past.

## The Ideal Flag for India

THE flutter of our flag on high is answered by a flutter of joy in every Indian heart. Our flag is the symbol of our fulfilment. It is intended to hold aloft in victory all that is most dear in our national life. With absolute devotion we stand under its happy flying sign, and wherever it beckons we are prepared to follow. But our love for it does not imply that the pattern it bears is completely satisfying. No matter what the pattern, it can count upon our allegiance. And yet we have the right to question whether those who have designed it have dipped their imagination sufficiently into the true heart of our land.

### *The Flags that are Inspired*

Only a few flags in the world seem to rise out of the depths of a nation's consciousness. The Union Jack is a true symbolic creation. When its lines are seen as running towards the centre, it finely expresses the meeting of many strands of race and culture that constitutes the being of England. And finely too the lines are shown as merged in the centre of a cross—emblem of the faith whose defender by title is the King. When they seem to run from the centre outwards they speak of the multi-

directional, far-flung energy of the greatest empire-building country on earth. And the three colours—red, white and blue—which are present in the design utter the enterprising spirit, the ideal of Pax Britannica and the sea-faring mood that have distinguished the history of England. An added appropriateness is in the blue colour serving as the background which bears the whole pattern; for it is the sea that more than anything else among material and visible influences has made England what she is.

The flag of France is equally true to the soul of that country. Here also are the three colours—blue, white and red. But they are put side by side, vertically, in a simple clear ordering. This ordering and that verticalness are both typical of the French genius, logical yet visionary, enthusiast at once of “the Goddess of Reason” and Jeanne d’Arc. The three colours in this particular sequence are also symbolic of the modern France which came to birth with the Revolution. Blue gives the tint of liberty—it suggests the free spaces of the sky. White gives the tint of equality—the subdual of all shades of difference in a pure impartial light. Red gives the tint of fraternity—the warm blood of love and fellow-feeling, and cordial communion.

The flag of the U.S.A. is another combination of the same colours in a significant scheme. The French ideals are also those of the United States, but with a different psychology. The United States is a continent as much as a country, it is full of diversity held together by a

common spirit. The many white stars and the same single blue within which they are set are beautifully expressive of the various unified richness, no less than of the lofty dream of everlasting equality and never-ending liberty. The alternate white and red stripes in a long repetition voice too the association of the changing with the uniform, no less than a widespread desire for democracy and brotherhood. The lack of the red colour in the star-design and of the blue in the stripe-design and yet the presence of a common colour—the white—in both are a further symbolism of the multiple yet one race-entity that is the U.S.A. Here is also the symbolism of an insistent conviction that in spite of differences all men are equal.

Japan's flag is a fourth example of inspired creation. The scarlet sun spraying its rays around but most emphatically to the side away from the flag-pole, the outer side which signifies the rest of the world, is strikingly true to Japan's nature and activity. The sun is symbolic of the belief of the Japanese in being the heaven-born race, endowed with a high mission over the whole earth. And the sun as red light depicts the life-force thrilling at the same time with a bliss of beauty and a sense of all-conquering power: the predominant motives of the Japanese consciousness—the aesthetic and the martial motives—authentically shine out in the depiction.

In the red banner, with the hammer and sickle and star, the Soviet Union has impressively figured itself. The proletarian mood is evident in the hammer and

sickle, but there is also evident the force that always beats down and the keenness that always cuts away—with an unchanging steely ruthlessness that has found its incarnation in a man like Stalin. The star is the creative touch of religious idealism that seems to have paradoxically and perversely become energetic irreligious materialism in the unspiritual and body-preoccupied faith and fervour filling the Marxist with a blind enthusiasm as if for a lofty cause that never should be questioned. The hammer, the sickle and the star are all of them yellow—meant to be felt as though charged with a power of enlightenment—but they are gripped, as it were, in a huge domineering uniform redness intense with a suggestion of intolerant and totalitarian violence whereby one fanatical all-merging class shall fight and destroy the opulent variety and diverse freedom of human mind and life.

*Our Flag is Constructed rather than Created*

Turkey and Pakistan have less inspiration in their ensigns, but in the crescent and star upon a crimson background and the crescent and star upon a background that is green these countries give adequate though conventional voice to the Islamic spirit. Can we say even this much about India and her flag? No doubt, what we have designed is not without meaning; but it seems constructed rather than created. The three colours of green, white and saffron are said to represent gene-

rous production, balanced conservation and disciplined utilisation—processes implicit in the progress of a country. The wheel in the middle is said to urge by its round shape, blue colour and twenty-four spokes the perfect and equal running of these processes; the sea-wide and sky-wide—in short, universal—application of them to our life; their persistent day-in day-out all-the-year-round need and validity for national well-being. The wheel is declared also to be representative of the march of man towards a higher standard of living: it suggests the cart-wheel, the potter's wheel, the spinning wheel. All these interpretations have point; yet how little they strike one as bringing out the genius of India!

The flag appears to be an economist's vision, concerned with the outer life and its beneficial, its profitable ordering. Of course, the wheel comes from a pillar erected by Asoka and carries a religio-ethical association; we may, therefore, read in its message a strain of *satya*, *ahimsa* and *karuna*—truth, non-violence and pity. Still, the level of the vision is not much uplifted; rather, the religio-ethical association is pulled down for want of a genuine spiritual intuition irradiating it. Economics, however moralised and humanitarian, can hardly do justice to the destiny of India. Surely, India's *summum bonum* is not compassed by a vision of well ordered, peaceful and democratic outer life scrupulously achieved and vigilantly sustained. Even if we add more nuances of significance we do not bring out India's soul. For instance, we may say that the three combined colours

stand for the unity of the main divisions into which the communities of the country fall—the Hindus who revere the sannyasi's saffron robe, the Muslims whose prophet favoured green, the Sikhs and Jains and Christians and Parsis who should get blended into a homogeneity like white which blends so many colours. Or else we may take green to be firmness and faith like the spontaneous clinging of green things to the soil, white to be probity and purity and harmlessness, saffron to be austerity and courage and sacrifice. And we may understand by the Asoka wheel the unerring and eternal law of karma which Buddha held to be the secret power in the interminable world-process. Even then the depths of India remain unexpressed.

### *No Touch of the Mystical Realisation*

There seems to be an attempt at embodying in the flag a thoroughly secular mood. No touch of the mystical realisation that lay at the sources of Indian history is allowed. The only sense in which India can be secular without ceasing to be herself—the rising above creed and caste into essential spirituality and the practising of spirituality with an eye turned not merely towards the Beyond but also towards the Here and Now—this sense is evidently overlooked. The inter-communal politico-religious tension of a particular period of our history has influenced overmuch the conception of our flag. And another exaggerated influence is the viewing of India in

terms of the worker, the labourer, the poor toiling majority: naturally such terms bring the economic values to the fore and make us see our country's fulfilment in the right production, conservation and utilisation of outward life-resources. The choice of that Buddhist emblem, the Asoka wheel, is in keeping with both the secular mood and the labourer-emphasis. For, in the first place, Buddhism, by its denial of either a personal-impersonal Godhead or a persistent soul and its refusal of metaphysical exploration and its insistence on a purely psychological approach to self-perfection, functions with a sort of agnostic spirituality, a negative mysticism, and appears to do away with religion while accepting morality. In the second place, it aims at being a rule of life for the common majority, it purports to offer a mysteryless religion, a non-esoteric revelation which all can accept. In the third place, it puts a premium on poverty and service and encourages a levelling down of social distinctions to a classless primitiveness. Buddhism is in tune also with the virtues underlined by Gandhi whose personality powerfully colours the thought of our leaders—the virtues of non-violence and humanitarian fellow-feeling. The Asoka wheel is, therefore, considered most appropriate as an emblem of the Indian consciousness. But it is blissfully forgotten that the heart and core of Buddhism is none of these aspects of Buddha's message but the all-annulling all-transcending experience of Nirvana, an experience which throws away the entire universe as a trifle or an illusion, an experience intensely and

immensely other-worldly and hence the absolute opposite of everything secular, everything connected with the outer life of mankind at large. It is also forgotten that Nirvana is so much above the head of the common man and so difficult of attainment that mankind at large can never have anything to do with it. Buddhism, in a very important sense, is as little democratic as it is secular.

### *The Nature of the Indian Genius*

It is, moreover, not fully in consonance with the Indian genius. That is why it is as good as defunct in the land of its birth. The genius of India can never be satisfied with a sort of agnostic spirituality and negative mysticism; nor with an endeavour at dissolving the variety and diversity of her mental and physical existence; nor, again, with setting at a discount the urge to realise a dynamic divinity, a spiritual and mystical light turned towards the flowering of noble and beautiful world-values. Non-violence and humanitarianism are also not the last word of the Indian ethical mind: a manifestation of God in humanity is the main ideal. Humanity is not a supreme value in itself, and non-violence and compassionate fellow-feeling are fine virtues but they are not the utter goal of the ethical life, the utter goal being nothing else than a general avatarhood, so to speak, which acts according to a spiritual and mystical truth within and which can even appear at times to be violent and ruthless, just as Sri Krishna appeared on the battlefield of Kurukshetra where humanity stood

divided into an army of the Divine and an army of the Diabolic. Further, the Indian genius is not democratic in the superficial modern manner. The whole world is indeed to be embraced by the individual's consciousness and the good of mankind at large has indeed to be worked for by every member of organised society; but the foundation of this democracy is in realising the God who is the One Superhuman in all that is human, and ever to this high, rare, extraordinary realisation the common mind is to be called, and each altruistic action must spring from that luminously aristocratic experience. The true Indian democracy, therefore, must lay stress not on the mere common man, not on mankind as it is in the majority: it must lay stress on the man of God, the Saint and the Seer, mankind as it is in the finest few and as in the majority it ought to be.

In the light of the above considerations we cannot help feeling that the true flag of India is yet to be found. This does not mean we should fail to respect and love the ensign we have before us. The ensign is set up with the purpose of drawing our thoughts to the wonderful being of our country and when we lift our eyes to its flight above our heads we look not so much at its pattern as at its general figuration of the triumphant spirit of our motherland. "Jai Hind" or "Vande Mataram" is what our hearts cry out, and through the green and white and saffron and through the Asoka wheel we move really towards that spirit. For the sake of that spirit which the flag-makers sought to catch and keep like a beacon for

the Indian multitudes, we must always give the most fervent response of patriotism even though the pattern may be inadequate to our country's inner greatness. But the flow of our devotion must not drown the fact that extremely desirable is a pattern with deeper significances, with more inspiration from the soul of this country whose life-breath has been the Divine and the Infinite.

### *The Ideal Flag*

Luckily, in our opinion, we do not have to cast about for the right pattern: we already possess it in the symbolisation made of India's spiritual mission by the greatest spiritual figure of our day.<sup>1</sup> The symbolisation by Sri Aurobindo uses a simple yet subtle combination of the three colours that we associate most with the overarching heavens—blue, silver and gold. It uses also the most beautiful and ancient Indian emblem of divine revelation, the lotus, but with a stylisation of it into a circle to create the impression of fullness and completeness; and there is a further packing of significances by making this circle concentric with two others within it of different dimensions, the innermost circle having nothing inside it while the middle has four divisions like petals and the outermost has twelve petallic divisions. "Golden—suggestive of luminous sovereignty—against a background of silvery blue is the lotus here. The Seed-Shakti of the Divine

<sup>1</sup> See Frontispiece.

Mother, creatrix of all, is pictured by the small centre in which all things seem to be held secretly concentrated. Out of this, four primary creative powers are shown as breaking: these are Maheshwari, Mahakali, Mahalakshmi, Mahasaraswati—goddess-personalities of wisdom, puissance, harmonious beauty, flawless organisation. These personalities are then depicted as putting forth twelve manifesting powers that work within the periodic time-process. The supreme infinity that is the all-containing and all-supporting Spiritual Self, the foundational mystery from which the Divine's creative and manifesting marvel stands out, is the background of silvery blue, in the centre of which the three-tiered lotus is placed. This silvery blue background is a square piece, each side of the square bearing to the diameter of the lotus the ratio of 6:12.5. This ratio gives the right balance: the four equal sides suggest a perfection of being, an omni-competence for a world-structure that can face and meet all demands.

Here is a flag charged with India's authentic mission, the mission of rendering victorious the Divine Mother, the Infinite Self and Shakti. In this flag we have the suggestion not only of a sky with an ethereal lotus poised in it, but also of a stretch of water with an earthly lotus afloat. The ever-existing ideality above and the secret wonder that is to be revealed below are both compassed in a satisfying symbolism. The full-blown circular lotus with two rows of petals seems to be the true inspired emblem which was hovering, so to speak, in the nation's inner mind but which through an insufficiently receptive

imagination our leaders miscaught as Asoka's wheel. Here too is a wheel-like design, but suffused with a superb meaning attuned to the Rig-Veda which is hidden in the heart of man and which the Indian consciousness has heard down the ages. Foremost here of all suggestions by the wheel-like design is the Presence of God as intuited by our country's Seers and Saints—the Presence of God within a lotus-chakra that is the centre of a luminous life on every level of the profound recesses of our subliminal and supraliminal being. In the colours, too, though we may see several implications pertaining to our outer existence, the master implication by virtue of this particular pattern remains the Infinite and the Divine.

In Sri Aurobindo's flag of Mother India and her spiritual mission we have also the promise of India's unity. For, the genuine indefeasible unity can come only of a sense in all men of the one God within, the God in whom alone are eternal liberty, equality and fraternity, the three grandest ideals that a country can pursue, the sole ideals that can make one harmonious country of all the countries constituting the world. If India wishes to be great by fulfilling her true genius and if she wishes to be the missionary of a world-union, no flag but this can ever be the symbol of her victorious emergence as an independent nation.

## Pacifism and the Indian Spirit

THE ideal of peace is felt by every Indian to be as old as India herself and ingrained in her immemorial culture: one of our best known scriptural phrases is the ancient Vedic message, *sarva janah sukhino bhavantu*, "let all people live in happiness through peace." But "peace" is a veritable proteus of a word. There can be a dead peace as well as a living one. Was it not said by Tacitus about the conquest of Germany by the Romans: *Solitudinem faciunt et pacem appellant*, "They make a solitude and call it peace"? Nor is it necessary to put a country to the sword in order to create the peace that is dead. If a country is either efficiently emasculated or ruthlessly regimented, we have a certain passivity or uniformity of mind, together with an absence of physical agitation, which has the appearance of peace but is really a state of death in disguise. For, there can be no peace that contradicts Cicero's definition: "liberty in tranquillity". Even the peace that can prevail among free peoples may not yet be a living one in the true sense of the word: it may be merely a temporary lull in which war is found to be inexpedient and a co-operative opportunism has play. Or else an open conflict may be absent and still a selfish feud on the ideological level go on and a self-interested economic

throat-cutting continue. Surely this is not the peace meant by sincere pacifists the world over and implied by the old phrase from the Rig-Veda.

*Should Pacifism Preclude War?*

Dr. Rajendra Prasad once defined peace as "good-will in action." A fair working definition, we may grant, but also a bit of a platitude likely to be pretty impotent unless we go beyond the purely ideative plane. For, active goodwill, as commonly conceived, cannot exist by itself and cannot persist for long. Man, as he ordinarily functions, is a mixture of the rational, the infra-rational, and the supra-rational. He tries to order his life according to his intelligence, but constantly the tiger and the ape in him break out, laying waste the neat and glittering tracts of his reasoning mind, and when there is not this reversal to animality there is often a sudden reaching forth towards something grand and godlike, some power more wide than the intellect, and "a light that never was on sea or land" upsets his reasoned arrangements of attitude and gesture, so that he behaves with a splendid strangeness which sets at nought his virtues no less than his vices, his philosophies as well as his fantasies. Goodwill in action is the voice of man's reason in its ethical aspect; but if reason is only the middle term between what is below and what is above how shall this goodwill be a lasting and effective force? Not that it is an utter contradiction of the below and the above:

there is in the former a certain instinct of mutual aid while in the latter is to be found a spontaneity of universal oneness, but the infra-rational has also a violent competitive impulse and the supra-rational brings at times a power of destruction at which the mere mind trembles and with which it can scarcely reconcile its principle of war-shunning pacifism. On one side, "Nature red in tooth and claw", on the other the dazzling devastation of Mahakali the Goddess who carries the Eternal Truth like a sword to cleave violently the darkness of ignorance and evil. No doubt there is also Mahalakshmi the beneficent Goddess, but she does not exclude the divine Warrior of the worlds; a subtle identity is between the two, most difficult for the human reason to understand and most disturbing to its ideative apotheosis of goodwill in action.

Although the brute competitiveness of the infra-rational is to be curbed, the sword-sweep of the supra-rational cannot be rejected. The cry of Sri Krishna at the battle of Kurukshetra, "Fight and win a mighty kingdom" is too clear to be allegorised away, too insistent in one form or another down the ages, especially at their turning-points, to be drowned by any mellifluous sentimentalism. So we must stop contrasting peace to war: under particular circumstances war cannot help having justification, and not only defensive but also offensive war, since frequently the best method of defence is attack. A squeamish recoil from physical combat and destruction has no basis in the divine

reality's method and movement *vis-à-vis* an evolving world in which truth and falsehood, right and wrong, beauty and ugliness are pitted against each other. Of course, every effort must be made to avoid such combat and destruction, compromise should go as far as is consistent with essential loyalty to the cause of civilisation, no mere convenience or superficial advantage should be cherished inordinately, yet a final resort to arms must not be looked upon as an evil. Consequently, from the highest point of view, absolute *ahimsa*, unmitigated non-violence, goes by the board at the very beginning of a discussion of pacifism. And when our Ministers make the apology that they are keeping an army and navy and air-fleet because they are too weak to follow correctly the ideal of pacifism and that this weakness should not be construed as a total forgetfulness of the ideal, they are making a false fetish of *ahimsa* and completely confusing the issue. Most of the foreign pacifists seem to be themselves in no less confusion, for the name of Gandhi as the apostle of non-violence is lavishly strewn in their writings and speeches. If *ahimsa* signifies repugnance from shedding all blood except one's own even when one is confronted with Hitler's panzers or, to take a smaller yet sufficiently vicious example, the marauding tribesmen who with Pakistan's connivance broke into Kashmir, then *ahimsa* is just an unconscious collaboration with anti-civilisation forces and, far from being a merit, a pernicious mistake. To refuse to see in some collectivities of

human beings on certain occasions of history a streak of the diabolic which cannot be mended but requires to be ended by physical attack is sheer blindness to facts. The last war threw these facts into so much relief that a host of sceptics, C. E. M. Joad the most prominent among them, who used to laugh at the idea of supernatural powers and principalities came to the necessity of faith in God by the curious road of finding themselves unable to overlook the existence of some sort of devilry acting from beyond the realm of Nature. Even in the absence of the markedly diabolic, we should be able to see the element of the infra-rational as quite likely at several times to need violent opposition on our part. *Ahimsa*, leading to an apologetic attitude towards our armed forces as if in keeping up the martial spirit we were defaulting from the ideal of the divine that India has always visioned, is an utter falsity. If the pacifists in India and abroad consider the avoidance of war by all means and the pedestalling of *ahimsa* at all costs to be the essence of their philosophy and their work, they are on a wrong track and, for all their good intentions, doing disservice to the world. Identify "goodwill in action" with extreme *ahimsa* and you immediately disqualify it from being a worthy pursuit.

What we have to pursue is noble effort to avoid war for selfish motives with their brood of hatred and greed: this is the only valid sense of pacifism in the context of international politics. Selfish motives: there is the

arch-evil which pacifism should work to remove. As a result, the mere avoidance of war is not the *summum bonum* even if war be something wholly to be shunned. Hatred and greed can run riot without assuming the shape of tank and bomber. As a reminder of this truth, the phrase "goodwill in action" is genuinely useful and plunges towards the heart not only of what sincere pacifists everywhere mean but also of what our own ancient culture implies. The heart of meaning here may be broadly put as: a state of consciousness unagitated by selfish motives and therefore, so far as these motives go, at peace with the world and expressing that peace in active relation with living creatures.

### *Goodwill and the Supra-rational*

The question, however, remains: Can the active goodwill possible to rational man be quite clear of selfish motives, and function effectively in the interests of genuine peace? There is a strong tendency today to look on man not as a middle term between the infra-rational and the supra-rational but as the final term of the evolutionary process: all advancement is considered a further and further refining of man's rationality and of the contrast it presents to what is below it—the animal kingdom. Many an Indian is inclined to be an agnostic: he does not deny the greatness of saints and mystics and yogis, yet he sees their greatness to lie rather in their intense humanitarian activity than in

their intense experience of the Divine and the Eternal. He even wonders whether this experience is not a kind of magnificent illusion and thinks that their humanitarian activity should be dissociated from it and set up as our goal. Here is an attitude almost akin to Bertrand Russell's. Russell admits the mystic's ecstasy as a datum of experience and says that what is of most value in human life is analogous to the lofty unselfish principles enunciated by the great religious teachers, but denies that mysticism implies a vision of the highest reality or that the equanimity and compassion that are the message of those teachers are best fostered by the mystical experience and cannot be fostered without it. But it should be evident that selfishness would be subdued most effectively if one has the experience of an ever-peaceful infinity-enjoying state like Atman or Nirvana in which the small ego of man is utterly annulled and that unless a Divine creative Mother or a beatific and luminous Lord of the world is realised by the heart no emotion of human brotherhood can attain an extreme life-transfiguring pitch. Call mysticism a holy hallucination, if you are bent on taking a superficial view of the testimony of the world's finest figures, but you cannot escape logically granting that nothing short of such an hallucination can give rise exceedingly to "what is", in Russell's own words, "of most value in human life." If you admit certain so-called moral virtues to be of paramount importance to rational man, you cannot by-pass the mystical quest of the supra-rational which

renders them the most beautifully potent, the most widely practicable.

Gandhi, whose name dominates most pacifist thinking, was not a mystic in the real sense in which Rama-krishna or Vivekananda, Raman Maharsi or Sri Aurobindo is, yet whatever intensity of fellow-feeling and unselfish behaviour he brought was born directly of his fervent faith in a God who was to him the perfect father of all creatures and the light of a stainless truth. To try to follow Gandhi's ideal and example without sharing his faith is, of course, possible: the ethical nature is not dependent on the religious motive for its instinctive impulsion and emotional exaltation. Even intellectually it can justify itself without that motive: to do unto others as we would others to do unto us may seem capital sense to the thinking mind. But there are two levels of thought—the provisional and pragmatic, the fundamental and philosophic. Although the first level can provide the ethicist with "sensible" supports, the second will give him no standing ground except religion. It lays bare the full implication of the ethical consciousness. Ethics is essentially normative: its key terms are "right", "duty", "obligation", "good", "ought". These terms cannot be derived from natural factors with any finality: the study of natural factors is science—a study which is purely descriptive and not in the least normative. The universe of the scientist is impotent to yield those terms. Not even a human natural factor like "society" can be their source, for it

can only impose on the individual what many individuals consider to be advantageous to collective existence and its will is not from any plane higher than that of the single individual and hence cannot have a definitely binding character. Mere numbers cannot make a thing right. Nor can any punishment visited on the recalcitrant individual prove the duty of not being dishonest, cruel and selfish: it can impress him only with the inexpediency of certain types of behaviour, convince him merely of the need to be clever enough to get away with dishonesty, cruelty and selfishness and not be foolishly found out. The real logic of ethical conduct can lie in nothing else than a Law Eternal behind the codes and statutes of men, a Law which men strive to embody according to their best lights. Our ideals and morals may not always image the divine depths of the Eternal Law, but logically there can be no idealism and morality without an effort or aspiration to image the depths that are divine of a Law that is eternal. The sense of unconditional imperativeness and inherent validity, without which no "ought" can have justification, must argue that we are ethical inasmuch as we strain to express a supreme and absolute Reality faultlessly guided by its own Truth-light. Philosophically, ethics can be neither valid nor imperative without a religious sanction. Goodwill has its sole logical support in a sense of God-will.

*Religion and Religionism*

Pacifism, therefore, should identify itself with faith in the Infinite and the Eternal, an open acknowledgment of the supra-rational source of the flow of the true, the beautiful and the good to the earth. However, we must admit that a religious orientation of rational man is insufficient to transfigure life so long as there is no marked turn towards mystical experience. For, religion tends to degenerate into religionism. What should be a matter of soul-discovery and of living contact and communion with the divine depths and heights of our being stops with a narrow creed, a rigid ritualism, a bigoted churchianity. The rational mind, if not influenced powerfully by the beyond-mind, is disposed to cut up the truth of existence and erect one part or another as the total verity: it cannot hold many things together in a harmonious synthesising view, the utmost it does is to attempt the subsumption of everything under one particular aspect which it exaggerates out of proportion. In consequence, we have trenchant oppositions of limited doctrines and, at best, "catholic systems" which yet are sectarian by sweeping all existence into a formula unduly magnifying a particular facet of reality. Intolerance, fanaticism, obscurantism are bound thus to go hand in hand with religion if the profound religious impulse is not directly aligned to the supra-rational. Progress has to come often by an attack on religious systems and much of

the modern world's intellectual and social development is due to its break with the religionism that was rampant up to the European Renaissance.

But this break, for all its benefits of reaction towards freedom and wideness, is a negative force and must sooner or later lead to an arrant materialism and a shipwreck of precious values. Religion true to the depths and heights of being from which it is a shining visitor to rational man is what should replace the credal, formal, sectarian stuff that is so perilous to the bosom and weighs so heavily upon the dreaming and aspiring heart. The turn not in the direction of crass secularity but in that of mystical experience should be the sequel to the leap away from religionism. One of the first signs of the desirable turn is the intellectual attempt to find the common vital measure of the various denominations into which the world of believers is fragmented: a movement like the International Congress of World Fellowship of faiths which lately met in India was therefore a right one. And it was as a significant and happy omen that a concourse of religious representatives bent on discovering ways and means to establish brotherhood in mankind should have taken place in India. But the full force of the omen would be lost if we failed to understand the stress India has always laid upon spiritual realisation, upon direct experience of the Divine. The motto of the International Congress of World Fellowship of Faiths was *Omnia vincit amor*, "Love conquers everything." Beautiful words—yet liable to be mere tinkling cymbals

until we break through the surface of their sentimental idealism and reach some meaningful *mantra* charged with the supra-rational. A gospel of "sweet reasonableness" set in a religious key cannot be the master-instrument of genuine pacifism. Although it will carry more conviction than any secular version of "goodwill in action", it will never, without the rhythm of mystical experience, re-tune the human heart to a divine harmony. There must be men in whom the rational has been absorbed and taken up into sainthood, seerhood, yoga—men who have inwardly opened to the Lord seated in the heart of hearts, the Cosmic Consciousness and the Transcendent Self and Master, men who are no moral preachers with an intellectually guided religious fervour but such as are at least on the way to realising the goal so integrally revealed in that fourfold *mantra* of Sri Aurobindo's:

*Arms taking to a voiceless supreme delight,  
Life that meets the Eternal with close breast,  
An unwalled mind dissolved in the Infinite,  
Force one with unimaginable rest.*

Yes, it is the mystic and the yogi who alone can bring the secret of world unity, the love that will conquer everything because it burns with the direct consciousness of the immortal, the illimitable and the perfect, has at all times the fire-keen impulsion of the supra-rational

truth and beatitude, and is no honeyed weakness of either the nerves or the emotions wedded to an unthinking and unqualified *ahimsa*, no syrup of goody-goodness manufactured from a recipe of pleasant religious ideas and conventional prayers, not even the sincere yet unenlightened zeal of social service in the name of a distantly paternal God, nor the well-meaning missionary indoctrination content with a result of superficial assent and formal knee-bending before the tables of the ten commandments or the eightfold path. If there is a God in whom are all beauty and harmony, an effort must be made to know Him as we know the sun of midday, feel Him as we feel our flesh and the flesh of those who are dear to us, live Him as we live our hungers and our desires, manifest Him as we manifest the weight and warmth and vigour of our bodies. In short, by setting forth on the *via mystica*, we must strive to reach in our lives an incarnation of the Divinity we worship. Congresses of faiths soon become, for all their speeches and resolutions, frail and futile memories unless the mystic and the yogi infuse life into them. Out of the great hum of holy words and high declarations that made famous in its own day the first Parliament of Religions at Chicago almost half a century back, only one creative cry has remained—the voice of Swami Vivekananda. It has remained because it broke from a living realisation of the Infinite and the Eternal. Vivekananda uttered his message with the actual mystical experience glowing within him of the one supreme Self of selves present everywhere

and the mighty Mother-Spirit from whom the entire universe has sprung.

His message may not be quite complete since with its superb dynamism it still mingled the feeling that man's fulfilment is ultimately outside earth and that the physical existence, the life-force and the mind-energy have to grow great and work magnificently for only a while and in the end serve as a stupendous bow shooting the soul out of the cosmos into some absolute Peace. Not a supra-cosmic quiescence is the supreme peace we need, any more than we need a cessation of the warrior, the hero, the *kshatriya* in us, or an outward political and social co-operation among earth's peoples precariously sustained with the help of a sort of liberal universal religion veneering with a reasoned goodwill our brute brain. The integral Godhead must be "force one with unimaginable rest," and our earth-being and its members must find perfection of themselves here and now in the multiplicity-in-unity of that supra-rational Power from whom this being and its members have originated because of some truth or archetype of them existing there. A divine creative and all-transforming peace should be our prayer. But, though we may look even beyond Vivekananda, his name is most appropriate in connection with the endeavour to establish world peace through religion. Without men like Vivekananda this endeavour will find little more than a glow-worm illumination, and neither moon nor star will shine for it, much less will dawn the day of truth.

## The Significance of the English Language in India

INDIA'S decision to remain a member of the Commonwealth in spite of being an independent sovereign Republic has given a new lease of life amongst us to the English language. Until recently English was apt to be regarded as the remnant of a foreign imposition, an inappropriate growth in the way of an authentic indigenous literature. Today it seems an appropriate and desirable link between us and the group of English-speaking nations with whom we have formed a voluntary association: it has become the medium of a larger existence in which we have elected to share. This is all to the good—especially as America with whom we shall have more and more to deal is English-speaking. But we shall be underestimating the significance of the English language in India if we think that it is only a valuable means of promoting our political, economic and technological interests in the democratic world. English is, above all, an immense cultural asset. And it is such an asset not simply because it renders available to us magnificent countries of the mind, but also because it renders possible to us the most magnificent expression of our own soul.

The first impulse, *vis-à-vis* this statement, will be to

cry, "Absurd paradox!" and to follow up with the question: "Can India really take to the English language as an instrument of her Indianness and make her utterance in it anything more than an exotic curiosity?" The answer, surely, cannot be given with a facile pointing out of the great increase in the number of Indians who talk and write fair English. The answer can only be given by seeing whether there is what Galsworthy termed "flower of author". The disclosure of inmost individuality through the subtlest potentialities of the language: this is "flower of author". Such "flower" need not be in one particular style as opposed to others. Simplicity and complexity, plainness and richness, urbanity and intense vibrancy—all these can equally allow it. Can we affirm that, in any style whatever, "flower of author" can be shown to be possible in English-writing India as something more than a rare, almost accidental, growth? Yes, we can. For two reasons.

### *The Indian Soul and the English Language*

What is called Indianness possesses as one of its main characteristics a power of multifold assimilation arising from a many-sidedness, a globality, in the unique peripatetic that is the Indian genius. The Indian genius is, of course, best described as spiritual; but it is not spiritual in a narrow way: it is an urge of synthesis of a hundred approaches to the Eternal, the Infinite, the Divine. Not only does it spiritualise everything in the

long run: it also spiritualises everything without depriving any term of its own essential quality. It annuls nothing by the transforming change it induces: it induces the change by raising all things to their own hidden heights of Supernature, as it were—heights at which they are most authentically themselves by being spiritual, by being facets of the Divine, the Infinite, the Eternal. Wonderfully synthetical and assimilative, it can also embrace and Indianise the quality of any race, the force of any culture; hence it can make both the mind and the movement of the English language part of its activity. This mind and this movement do not confront it as utterly foreign: they come to it striking sympathetic chords in its multi-rhythmed heart. That is the first reason why “flower of author” in English can be an Indian growth drawing not unnaturally or accidentally its nourishment from the soil of the Indian soul.

The second reason is the character of the English language itself. No other modern language is so varied in mentality, so diverse in turn. It is a fusion of many strains—the Celtic, the Roman, the Saxon, the Teuton, the French, the Italian have mingled in it, and the Greek soul and the Hebrew soul have also coloured it. As a result, it is an extremely plastic and versatile instrument capable of being expressive of multifarious types of consciousness. No wonder it does not have any marked tradition of persistent mood or manner—as, for instance, French has; no wonder, too, it is notable for numberless idiosyncrasies: and no wonder, again, it has proved so adequate a medium

for every innovation of outlook and in-look, whether it be the adventurous imaginative gusto of the Renaissance, the gorgeous oriental religiosity of Hebraism, the passion and wonder and Nature-feeling of the Romantic Movement, the vague poignancies and dim wizardries of Celtic paganism. The synthetical and assimilative Indian genius meets in the English tongue a multiplicity and pliancy of temper and tone which give that genius all the more chance of taking hold of this tongue for living self-expression.

There is no doubt that "flower of author" is, for Indians, possible in English. This does not, of course, imply possibility for all and sundry. Such possibility is not there for Indians in even the indigenous languages: every Indian is not a literary master. And, where English is concerned, it is quite to be expected that "flower of author" should be less common than in those languages. But to maintain that Indian utterance in English can only be an exotic curiosity and never an organic unfolding of genuine Indianness is to indulge in a sweeping superficiality. What now remains to be shown is that true Indian utterance in English is more than just possible and that it can be in quality finer and greater than in any language spoken by Indians today. This is the supreme paradox we have to elucidate—and if we can elucidate it we shall have dealt the death-blow to all efforts by our educationists to minimise the importance of English in our cultural self-expression.

*The Fittest Body for the Indian Genius*

English is unquestionably the most highly developed of modern languages both by virtue of the large variety of racial and psychological strains in it and by virtue of the extraordinary crop of poets in English history. Poetry is the sovereign power of all language: where poets of high quality abound there the language reaches the highest development, especially when the language itself has immense potentialities. No student of the world's literature will dispute that England stands head and shoulders above other modern countries in poetry. Neither in modern Europe nor anywhere else do we find such a poetic galaxy as Shakespeare, Milton, Spenser, Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, Coleridge, Swinburne, Francis Thompson and Yeats. In consequence of the intensely inspired impact of poets like these, the versatile English language has acquired a unique capacity for strangely suggestive effects—the super-subtle phrase, the packed visionary phrase, the phrase of indefinable intonation. Even in prose the unique capacity has its play and, within the less daring terms proper to prose, English still surpasses all modern languages, including those of India herself, in the immediacies and intimacies of intuitive speech. If this is so, then English is bound to be most valuable to the genius of a country which is not only synthetical and assimilative in the extreme but also spiritual to the *n*th degree; for, a speech with extraordinary potentialities of strangely suggestive effects suits most the magic, the mystery, the

depth, the sudden and sublime revelatory reach of the spiritual consciousness. English promises, therefore, to be the expressive body *par excellence* of our true soul.

What adds to our conviction about this promise is the fact that the strangely suggestive potentialities of English have already been pressed into service of the spiritual consciousness by English writers themselves. Herbert's religious simplicity, at once piquant and passionate—Crashaw's rich sensuousness kindling into ecstatic devotion—Donne's nervous intricate power troubling the Inscrutable—Vaughan's half-obscure half-bright straining beyond thought into mystical vision—Wordsworth's profound contemplative pantheistic peace—Blake's deeply delicate radiance—Coleridge's glimmering occultism of the weird and the haunting—Shelley's rainbowed rapture of some universal Light and Love—Keats's enchanted luxuriance, through allegory and symbol and myth, in the Sovereign Beauty that is Sovereign Truth—Patmore's pointed polished ardour of the intellect for "the unknown Eros"—Francis Thompson's restless and crowded and colourful heat of response to "the many-splendoured Thing"—Yeats's bewitched echo to the Immortal Loveliness in its world-wandering—AE's crystalline contact with superhumanly populated twilights within and divinely inhabited dawns above—all these quickenings of the spiritual consciousness are already present in English and have turned it to what may be called Indian uses. Doubtless, the uses are still somewhat elementary in comparison to what the Indian genius has achieved in the

ancient Sanscrit of the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Gita. But the fact stands that English lends itself as the fittest body to this genius with an actually accomplished functioning, however initial, along our own national soul-trend. Hence, if we are to fulfil that trend the most natural no less than the most desirable act on our part is to find voice in English.

### *The Supreme Destiny of English*

Not that the indigenous languages should be neglected. They must be developed. But English at present comes to us with a face of supreme destiny. And what that destiny is can be seen even now. For, even now, before our very eyes, it is being wonderfully worked out. A band of Indian poets remarkably gifted are uttering in English the mystical experience with an intense fidelity and felicity, and at their head is one of the greatest figures of the contemporary world and he has banished all shadow of doubt regarding the destiny we have spoken of. Sri Aurobindo has given the world what is at once the finest and grandest literary achievement of modern India and the deepest and highest articulation of Indian spirituality today—the epic with which he was occupied in the spare hours of a Yogi and which grew to over twenty-five thousand lines: *Savitri, a Legend and a Symbol*. In *Savitri*, we have proof as ample as we could wish that, while our vernaculars more easily provide us with footholds for climbing beyond commonplaces into the

revelatory intensities of literature, English alone enables at present the soul of India to attain the absolute peak of self-expression.

And from that peak the soul of India will communicate, to the whole Commonwealth and to all America and to whatever country is in touch with them, the harmonious rhythms of its own greatness. Far and wide, by means of English, the Indian genius will spread the word born from the occult immensities that are the luminous source and support and goal of its unique history. Embodied in this language by India, Inspiration

*with her lightning feet,  
A sudden messenger from the all-seeing tops,*

will conquer the heart and mind of humanity. Not through translations from Bengali, Gujarati, Marathi, Tamil or Hindi—beautiful and powerful instruments of truth though they may prove—but directly through the tongue that was Shakespeare's and is now Sri Aurobindo's, the peoples of the earth will most vividly know India as the creative bride of the Divine and as the mighty mother of a new age which shall justify the light on man's upward face.

## Sri Aurobindo—the Poet: Rejoinders to Recent Criticisms

### I

IN the *Illustrated Weekly of India* (July 31, 1949) appeared a comment on Sri Aurobindo's poetry. It was by C.R.M. in *Books and Comments* and written apropos of my study, *The Poetic Genius of Sri Aurobindo*. After calling my book interesting, C.R.M. went on to say:

"For Mr. Sethna, Sri Aurobindo's Muse is a case of 'this side idolatry', and I am not so sure that genius is so rampant here as he claims. The merits seem to me to consist of a high level of spiritual utterance, abundant metrical skill, and a sound poetic sensitivity based on the classics and much akin to that of many of the more conservative masters. Sometimes it is as if Sri Aurobindo had taken the cream of Milton, Wordsworth and Tennyson and stirred it to boiling point in the cauldron of his Muse. There are some first-rate passages of blankverse, e.g.

*Only he listens to the voice of his thoughts, his heart's  
ignorant whisper,  
Whistle of wind in the tree-tops of Time and the rustle  
of Nature.*

"Elsewhere there are many pleasant lines of a derivative

nature and it is interesting to find traces of the influence of that Yellow Book character, the poet Stephen Phillips, who was at Cambridge with Sri Aurobindo. The Tennysonian influence is still stronger:

*And lightning 'twixt the eyes intolerable  
Like heaven's vast eagle all that blackness swept  
Down over the inferior snowless heights  
And swallowed up the dawn.*

"This, in spite of, or because of, that horrible word 'twixt (a crutch for amateur versifiers!) might be from the *Idylls*, and, by stressing the resemblance, one does not mean to decry Sri Aurobindo's talents, for Victoria's laureate was a master of rhythm and a true delineator of beauty."

Naturally, as the author of *The Poetic Genius of Sri Aurobindo*, I could not let C.R.M.'s comment pass. I wrote him a letter and requested its publication. The reply, though not ungenerous, scarcely served my purpose. It ran: "I find your letter on Sri Aurobindo's poetry very interesting and well-expressed (though it hasn't changed some of my opinions!) but I regret that my space is so confined that there is no room for it and we have no correspondence column in the *Weekly*." As C.R.M. is a gifted writer of considerable popularity and his readers may accept his estimate of Sri Aurobindo, it is necessary that I should voice in *Mother India* what was originally meant for the *Weekly*.

*The Originality of a Master of Yoga*

C.R.M.'s paragraphs, though appreciative in places and hitting off the truth here and there, seem to me on the whole to miss the mark because of his rather cursory acquaintance with Sri Aurobindo's poetry and a certain haste in making up his mind. When he says, "Sometimes it is as if Sri Aurobindo had taken the cream of Milton, Wordsworth and Tennyson and stirred it to boiling point in the cauldron of his Muse," it is not easy to agree even if his statement be applied to Sri Aurobindo's early work which is not that of a full-fledged Yogi; but when we come to his later work—especially his latest and longest, the epic *Savitri, a Legend and a Symbol*, to which I have devoted many pages in my book—the statement loses all relevance. Milton's intellectual theology, Wordsworth's half-philosophical half-emotional pantheism and Tennyson's vague religious idealism can hardly be equated with the vision and experience of a Master of Yoga. As for the manner, it is equally individual in its turns and tones. Except that Sri Aurobindo, like Milton, Wordsworth and Tennyson, does not bring in the typical modernist idiom *à la* Eliot of *The Waste Land*, nowhere are these poets in either the substance or the style of lines like

*A body like a parable of dawn,  
That seemed a niche for veiled divinity  
Or golden temple-door to things beyond,*

or,

*The dubious godhead with his torch of pain  
Lit up the chasm of the unfinished world  
And called her to fill with her vast self the abyss,*

or,

*A wandering hand of pale enchanted light  
That glowed along a fading moment's brink  
Fixed with gold panel and opalescent hinge  
A gate of dreams ajar on mystery's verge,*

or,

*The superconscious realms of motionless peace  
Where judgment ceases and the word is mute  
And the Unconceived lies pathless and alone.*

These lines, with their direct mystical insight and their suggestive rhythm carrying the concrete life-throb of a Yogi's supra-intellectual consciousness, are not only different in a striking way from the typically Miltonic, Wordsworthian or Tennysonian poetry but also lead us to question C.R M.'s phrase: "a sound sensitivity based on the classics and much akin to that of many of the more conservative masters." The term "conservative" is in itself debatable. What are called the "classics" are seldom conservative except in the sense that they are not flashy and flamboyant, addicted to involved conceit and confusing imagery, limping in metre and jaggedly irregular in form. If actually there are any conservative

masters, the poet of *Savitri* is little akin to them in sensitivity. He has a warm suddenness of simile, a sweeping boldness of metaphor, a varicoloured intensity of vision, a breath-bereaving grandeur of intuition. Nor can the sensitivity shown in these things be said to have its basis in the classics, though the latter too are beautifully or powerfully vivid. Rather a vividness most revolutionary is at work in the Aurobindonian sensitivity—simile, metaphor, vision, intuition, all are of an unusual inner experience mostly beyond the classics. Sri Aurobindo's sensitivity is based on the classics in only one respect: it is neither morbid nor injudicious and has a certain poise and control in even the midst of extreme novelty and force. "Sound" it is, in the best connotation of the term, like the sensitivity of the classics, but its soundness, like that of the other, is an attribute which makes for the genuinely great utterance as distinguished from the merely rushing, dazzling, distracting speech, and does not imply any imitativeness or want of "fine frenzy."

*Is Sri Aurobindo's Early Blank Verse  
like Tennyson's "Idylls"?*

As regards the early blank verse, written mostly in the poet's own twenties and in the last decade of the nineteenth century, the comment that in it the Tennysonian influence, especially from the *Idylls of the King*, is the strongest strikes one as too sweeping. There is an audacious Elizabethan temper in this blank verse, and

Milton, Keats, Arnold and the finest of Stephen Phillips are there as general influences much more than Tennyson. Least of all is the mood or the manner of the *Idylls* dominant. The early Tennyson had great lyrical and descriptive power, but the poet of the *Idylls* has, in the main, a marked lack of intensity and is more absorbed in decorating and elaborating the obvious and mirroring the rather mawkish sentimentality and prudish respectability of the typical Victorian temperament than in expressing profound vision and emotion. A considerable skill in metre and rhythm is there, but, except on rare occasions, it is not wholly charged with poetic inspiration. Creative energy, whether puissant or delicate, is wanting, and in its place we have an adroit yet somewhat empty elegance that is not seldom on the verge of being musically-turned prose. These faults are precisely what are most absent in Sri Aurobindo's youthful blank verse. Even when a Tennysonian influence may be traced, it is just the passion and the poignancy and the true poetic tone that render him non-Tennysonian. Consider this passage of Tennyson's in the middle of the *Enid* story:

*O purblind race of miserable men,  
How many among us at this very hour  
Do forge a life-long trouble for ourselves,  
By taking true for false, or false for true;  
Here, thro' the feeble twilight of this world  
Groping, how many, until we pass and reach  
That other, where we see as we are seen...*

Put it side by side with the following from Sri Aurobindo's *Love and Death*—part of a lament by a lover visiting the land of the dead—where to a superficial eye the Tennysonian influence may seem strong:

....*O miserable race of men,  
With violent and passionate souls you come  
Foredoomed upon the earth and live brief days  
In fear and anguish, catching at stray beams  
Of sunlight, little fragrances of flowers;  
Then from your spacious earth in a great horror  
Descend into this night, and here too soon  
Must expiate your few inadequate joys.*  
*O bargain hard! Death helps us not. He leads  
Alarmed, all shivering from his chill embrace,  
The naked spirit here...*

A world of difference behind the surface resemblance should be evident. Sri Aurobindo is all vibrant and sensitive, the poetry is unforced, unflogged, and though the art is consummate there is little of the deliberative and consciously constructive. Genuine vitality is the distinguishing mark of the nineteenth-century Sri Aurobindo as it is of the twentieth-century one, and such vitality is the one thing that is mostly to seek in Tennyson of the *Idylls*. To look upon this Tennyson as “a master of rhythm and a true delineator of beauty” is as serious a mistake as to see him cropping up in Sri Aurobindo.

*The Difference between "Traditional"  
and "Derivative"*

It would be rash to deny influences in *Urvasie* or *Love and Death*, the works of Sri Aurobindo's youth. However, not only is the influence of the *Idylls* most faint, if at all, but also the other influences do not prevent the play of a fresh individual style reflecting an individual temperament and taking up the best of blank-verse masters into a new creation with qualities all its own of beauty and power:

*Snow on ravine, and snow on cliff, and snow  
Sweeping in strenuous outlines to heaven,  
With distant gleaming vales and turbulent rocks,  
Giant precipices black-hewn and bold  
Daring the universal whiteness.*

Or take the passage in which Pururavas paused not on the plains nor on the foot-hills

*But plunged over difficult gorge and prone ravine  
And rivers thundering between dim walls,  
Driven by immense desire, until he came  
To dreadful silence of the peaks and trod  
Regions as vast and lonely as his love.*

That the blank verse should be nineteenth-century in

certain respects was inevitable, since it belonged to that period; but this in itself is no fault at all. And to say that it has "many pleasant lines of a derivative nature" is both to be patronising out of turn and to be deficient in close and keen scrutiny. To characterise as merely pleasant the poetic intensity that is Sri Aurobindo's is to be perilously near the level of the flapper who called the Himalaya "so sweet" and the Falls of Niagara "so dinky". To talk of his being "derivative" is not only to forget the genius-touch that can make all shadows of past masters part of an entirely novel chiaroscuro but also to perpetrate a confusion between the derivative and the traditional. Sri Aurobindo's blank verse can be called traditional. But to be traditional is not to be debarred from originality and greatness. While being traditional, one can be, if one has the genius, as original and great as Homer, Virgil, Lucretius, Marlowe, Milton, Keats. An infinite diversity is possible within traditionalism, and numberless heights and depths of vision and emotion can be reached through traditional technique. There is quite an amount in the later work of Sri Aurobindo that breaks new ground in technique and also goes psychologically beyond the general sources of poetry in the past; hence he cannot be dubbed altogether traditional. But wherever he is such, he is in the line of the masters and, though I do not idolatrously accept everything written by Sri Aurobindo as being always "tops", I consider the epithet "derivative" utterly misguided.

*A singular Oversight and a Strange Insensitiveness*

The particular quotation C.R.M. has made in this connection does not show Sri Aurobindo at his most typical. I admit that it is not one of his best moments. But apart from its being neither Tennysonian "idylls"-like in especial nor in any distinguishable way derivative, I should like to protest in the first place that it is robbed of its own proper effect by a singular oversight by C.R.M. Can any one make grammatical sense out of the line about lightning? Suspended solitarily in front of those about "all that blackness", it has neither point nor bearing. It acquires meaning and relevance only if we quote it together with a few preceding it and restore the mutilated passage thus:

*...and with a roar of rain  
And tumult on the wings of wind and clasp  
Of the o'erwhelmed horizons and with bursts  
Of thunder breaking all the body with sound  
And lightning 'twixt the eyes intolerable,  
Like heaven's vast eagle all that blackness swept  
Down over the inferior snowless heights  
And swallowed up the dawn.*

In the second place, I should like to protest that C.R.M.'s stricture on the word "'twixt" in the lightning-line is insensitive. He regards this word as horrible and calls it "a crutch for amateur versifiers." Strange that a word

which can be found in all the best poets from Spenser downwards and which has nothing unpoetic about it except that twentieth-century poets do not frequently employ it should be criticised at just the place where it is most appropriate. When William Watson spoke of a time

*Pendulous 'twixt the gold hour and the grey*

he was certainly not propping himself up in amateur versification; the word is subtly expressive of brief delicate suspension. Even more apt is it in Sri Aurobindo's line. Look at it carefully, listen to it attentively. Does it not carry the precise suggestion of lightning? The same reason that makes the word "blitz" so appropriate for lightning applies here.

Coming finally to the quotation which C.R.M. rightly judges to be first-rate—

*Only he listens to the voice of his thoughts, his heart's  
    ignorant whisper,  
Whistle of wind in the tree-tops of Time and the rustle of  
    Nature—*

I may remark that it is not strictly a sample, as his description puts it, of blank verse. It is blank verse only in the sense that there are no rhymes. It is not pentametrical with an iambic base, as English blank verse is. It really illustrates the hexameter rhythm which Sri Aurobindo,

shedding new light on quantitative prosody in English, achieves with striking inspired originality. To demonstrate this originality as well as the excellence of his blank verse and the remarkable revelatory force of his recent mystical poetry is the main aim of my book. C.R.M. has said hardly anything about my detailed treatment of my theme in this book, the patient careful critical analysis with which I have attempted to substantiate my thesis. Poetry is a "ticklish" affair and one must live with any poet's work a good deal and often with the help of somebody steeped in it, if one is to get over the surfaciness of impression to which one is liable, what with the fads and fancies that are most at play in one's reactions when the impact on one is of something directed not at one's "rational" mind but at one's temperament and taste and instinct—factors which if not specifically trained to be catholic are likely to trip up even critics like Johnson, Arnold and Eliot. May I hope that C.R.M. whose writings are often acute as well as charming will give my book a closer reading and, instead of being in a hurry to pass judgment, open himself more sensitively, more discerningly, to the Aurobindonian inspiration?

## II

Mr. P. Lal has issued "A Testament for our Poets." He has some pointed and pertinent things to say, but he spoils their effect by falling foul rather violently of

one about whom Francis Watson, in a broadcast on English Poetry from India, said that he was the one Indian poet whom Yeats had singled out as writing creatively in English. Yeats is well-known for his somewhat supercilious manner towards Indo-English poets: hence a comment like this from him has a rare value—particularly as he was himself one of the greatest contemporary poets in the English language. Mr. Lal seems to have been exceptionally unfortunate in his choice of Sri Aurobindo as a whipping post.

His own personal preference is for “realistic poetry reflecting...the din and hubbub, the confusion and indecision, the flashes of goodness and beauty of our age.” There is nothing intrinsically objectionable in this penchant, provided it does not deprive one of sensitiveness to other kinds of poetry. But there must be no particular philosophical shade attached to the word “realistic” as if poetry that is not a product of so-called “realism” were a dressing up of unreality. Art is out of touch with reality only when its expression is abstract or imprecise instead of in concrete and vivid terms. Reality, for art, is simply that which is real to the artist and which he can best seize in perfect form with concreteness and vividness.

### *Wrong Approach*

Such a position is not altogether repudiated by Mr. Lal—in broad theory. But he has grave limitations of

perception and sympathy, rendering his theory itself a little hazy, and he cannot help bringing into it his temperamental preferences. He reacts against romanticism on the one hand and "criticism of life" on the other. In condemning Sri Aurobindo's epic *Savitri* and warning Indian poets to keep away from the Aurobindonian brand of verse if they wish to do anything worth while, he also betrays a most serious lack of response to spiritual poetry.

He, of course, protests that he cannot be considered totally unsympathetic to poetry of a spiritual order. "I can read," he says, "the *Divine Comedy* with pleasure, St. John of the Cross is a marvellous poet, poems of Kabir and Chandidas are exquisite, T. S. Eliot's *Ash-Wednesday* is an excellent poem of spiritual tension, confusion and resolution which I can read with great enjoyment and recall with surprising accuracy and detail." Well, the protest is far from convincing. Dante was a first-rate religious poet, not a spiritual or mystic one: he was well-versed in theology, perfectly conversant with the living symbols of the Catholic creed, his imagination was finely and powerfully touched by religious fervour, but there never was any invasion of his consciousness by the super-conscious and he had not the temperament or the experience of the Saints who figure in his *Paradiso*. By the way, apart from certain later portions, the *Divine Comedy* is not even directly religious poetry: only its setting is in terms of religion. T. S. Eliot also is in part an effective poet of religious feeling and idea: the tension, confusion

and resolution in *Ash-Wednesday* are not spiritual in the true sense and they are more misty than mystic. Not that a state of mind is not infused into us by them but they give us neither the concreteness nor the intensity of spiritual vision and mystic experience. Mr. Lal's ignorance of this fact proves that he has no clear idea of spiritual poetry.

St. John of the Cross is a real mystic and in his poems there is the immediacy of inner contact with the Eternal. But they are spiritual and mystic in a certain way—a highly personal devotion-coloured lyricism, deeply intense yet not charged with the powerful amplitude of vision and vibration such as we find in verses of the Upanishads, verses which seem to be the Infinite's own large and luminous language. Kabir and Chandidas are somewhat in the same category, though with a difference of tone and temper. They are indeed, as Mr. Lal says, exquisite and they are authentically spiritual, but again more intense than immense and the masterful mantric expression is not theirs. If Mr. Lal responds to St. John of the Cross and to these two Indian singers he is not without all spiritual sympathy: still, he cannot be said to show any sensitiveness to the kind of inspiration that is *Savitri*. We are not surprised that he fails to appreciate it.

### *Poetic Communication*

Here we are likely to have a couple of paragraphs from his own article thrown at our heads by him. He has

written: "The job of all poetry is to convey an experience which the reader has not himself experienced but to which he is made sympathetic by the rhythm, linguistic precision and incantation of the poem he is reading.... The good poem must be able to communicate an emotion to me even when I have only the faintest intellectual, and no emotional, idea of what that emotion is."

But surely there must be something in the reader to serve as a *point d'appui* for the poet's effort at communication. Else we shall be obliged to reject *Lycidas* as no poetry because Dr. Johnson found it crude and unmelodious, Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads* as sheer prose because Jeffreys remarked, "This will never do," Shelley's work as valueless because Mathew Arnold shook his head about it, Swinburne's early lyrics as meretricious stuff because Morley castigated them ruthlessly. And, mind you, these were no small and narrow critics on the whole. If they could have a blind spot on their critical retina and prove unreliable on occasion, Mr. Lal who is obviously restricted in his general sympathies and semi-perceptive of the spiritual light in poetry can hardly hope to impress us by his statement: "When I read any passage from Sri Aurobindo's 'epics', a sick-as-stale-lemonade shiver gallops up and down my spine at a rate impossible to compute"—or by his description of *Savitri*-like verse as "greasy, weak-spined and purple-adjectived poetry," "a loose expression of a loose emotion"—or by his warning that unless poets like him band together and produce a Manifesto "there is every likelihood that the

blurred, rubbery and airy sentiments of a Sri Aurobindo will slowly clog our own poetry."

### *Spiritual Vision and Philosophy*

One point we may grant the preposterous Mr. Lal. If poets like him tried to write in Sri Aurobindo's vein without any of the Aurobindonian discipline of consciousness and mystical drive of the inner being, they might very well turn out in verse a painted anaemia of pseudo-spirituality. Spiritual poetry cannot be written on the cheap, but that does not mean that what Sri Aurobindo writes answers to Mr. Lal's designation of *Savitri. Prima facie*, a master of spiritual experience, with a consummate knowledge of the English language (Sri Aurobindo was educated from his seventh to his twenty-first year in England), is not likely to pen feverishly feeble inanities and pass them off as mysticism. If he is in addition an intellectual and a philosopher of giant proportions, all the less probable is it that his mystical expression should be greasy and weak-spined and purple-adjectived. At his worst he might be in danger of seeming elusive and esoteric or else remote and recondite. Mr. Lal's terms are absolutely irrelevant and incorrect.

One cannot tax with either gaudiness or prettification Sri Aurobindo's revelatory glimpses of Super-nature:

*The ways that lead to endless happiness  
Ran like dream-smiles through meditating vasts:*

*Disclosed stood up in a gold moment's blaze  
White sun-steppes in the pathless Infinite.*

Nor can one accuse of empty effusiveness his packed profound depiction of what man in his ignorance of the meaning of his life and of his high and splendid fate never sees in the dynamics of world-history:

*Only the Immortals on their deathless heights  
Can see the Idea, the Might that change Time's course,  
Come maned with light from undiscovered worlds,  
Hear, while the world toils on with its deep blind heart,  
The galloping hooves of the unforeseen event,  
Bearing the superhuman rider, near  
And, impassive to earth's din and startled cry,  
Return to the silence of the hills of God;  
As lightning leaps, as thunder sweeps, they pass  
And leave their mark on the trampled breast of Life.*

Nor is there any pompous vacuity in his brief suggestive conjuration of the human deepening into the divine:

*Our minds hush to a bright Omniscient,*

or in that phrase about the divinised consciousness's vivid play of self-disclosure within its own universal oneness:

*Idea rotated symphonies of sight,  
Sight was a flame-throw from identity.*

All this is pure spiritual vision which seems to have made little impression on Mr. Lal during his reading of *Savitri*. But *Savitri* is spiritual philosophy as well as spiritual vision, and Mr. Lal is equally at sea with a poetry that fuses the philosophical mind with mystic symbolism and revelation. Else how could he miss the concreteness and vividness of a large-idea'd utterance like:

*Thought lay down in a mighty voicelessness;  
The toiling thinker widened and grew still,  
Wisdom transcendent touched his quivering heart:  
His soul could sail beyond thought's luminous bar;  
Mind screened no more the shoreless Infinite.  
Across a void retreating sky he glimpsed  
Through a last glimmer and drift of vanishing stars  
The superconscious realms of motionless peace  
Where judgment ceases and the word is mute  
And the Unconceived lies pathless and alone.*

Or take the following philosophically spiritual lines:

*Immense realities took on a shape:  
There looked out from the shadow of the Unknown  
The bodiless Namelessness that saw God born  
And tries to gain from the mortal's mind and soul  
A deathless body and a divine name.  
The immobile lips, the great surreal wings,  
The visage marked by Superconscious sleep,  
The eyes with their closed lids that see all things,  
Appeared of the Architect who builds in trance.*

Or consider a passage like this—an example of something that occurs very frequently in *Savitri*—about earth's aspiration and her future fulfilment:

*An inarticulate whisper drives her steps  
 Of which she feels the force but not the sense;  
 A few rare intimations come as guides.  
 Immense divining flashes cleave her brain...  
 A vision meets her of supernal Powers  
 That draw her as if mighty kinsmen lost  
 Approaching with estranged great luminous gaze...  
 Outstretching arms to the unconscious Void,  
 Passionate she prays to invisible forms of Gods,  
 Soliciting from dumb Fate and toiling Time  
 What most she needs, what most exceeds her scope,  
 A Mind unvisited by illusion's gleams,  
 A Will expressive of soul's deity,  
 A Strength not forced to stumble by its speed,  
 A Joy that drags not sorrow for its shade.  
 For these she yearns and feels them destined hers:  
 Heaven's privilege she claims as her own right.  
 Just is her claim the all-witnessing Gods approve,  
 Clear in a greater light than reason owns:  
 Our intuitions are its title-deeds;  
 Our souls accept what our blind thoughts refuse.  
 Earth's winged chimeras are Truth's steeds in Heaven,  
 The impossible God's sign of things to be.*

It would really be a critical apocalypse if one could

learn from Mr. Lal where in any of these magnificent excerpts is a stale-lemonade quality or a riot of blurred, airy and rubbery sentiments. One might as well look for an orgy of purple adjectives, or weak-spined greasiness, or loose emotion loosely expressed, in the profound-sighted and high-thoughted *slokas* of the Gita. Transposed to the plane of spiritual vision and spiritual philosophy, illumined and enlarged in the consciousness of a seer-sage, all that Mr. Lal demands of a true poem is here in abundance: “a choreographical pattern within a state of tension produced in a refined sensibility”—“language used precisely, nobly and with a sense of purpose.”

### *Unjust Criticism*

To be sure, the whole of *Savitri* is not uniformly inspired, but that is natural. In a long epic narrative in which a story is unfolded or a sequence of experiences developed, inspiration has to build sober bridges, so to speak, between the glories of its dramatic moments. Even Dante who is more uniformly inspired in his *Divine Comedy* than most of the other great epic poets has his slightly relaxed periods. And as for Homer in the *Iliad* and Milton in *Paradise Lost*, they either nod or plod on occasion and still remain mighty names in the roll of poetry.

Even when the verse is not a sober bridge between the glories of dramatic moments, there is bound to be

in a poem of considerable length and ample range of subject an inequality in the expression. What we have to appreciate in *Savitri* is the rareness of the inequality and the presence of some authentic minimum of inspiration in the passages where the afflatus tends to sink. According to Mr. Lal, there is no authentic inspiration of any kind in the following:

*All there was soul or made of sheer soul-stuff:  
 A sky of soul covered a deep soul-ground.  
 All here was known by a spiritual sense:  
 Thought was not there but a knowledge near and one  
 Seized on all things by a moved identity...  
 Life was not there but an impassioned force,  
 Finer than fineness, deeper than the deeps,  
 Felt as a subtle and spiritual power,  
 A quivering out from soul to answering soul,  
 A mystic movement, a close influence,  
 A free and happy and intense approach  
 Of being to being with no screen or check,  
 Without which life and love could never have been.  
 Body was not there, for bodies were needed not,  
 The soul itself was its own deathless form  
 And met at once the touch of other souls,  
 Close, blissful, concrete, wonderfully true...*

Well, can we say to Mr. Lal: "You are right for at least once"?

I am sorry that even this concession is out of the

question. Read without prejudice, the passage for all its comparative inferiority has nothing to sicken us. There is a balanced systematic development of the theme of soul-stuff being all, and the lines—

*Thought was not there but a knowledge near and one  
Seized on all things by a moved identity—*

cannot be bettered for accurate expression in a certain style, the phrase “near and one” is particularly pregnant for any alert intellect and the word “seized” is concrete and vivid as is also the word “moved”: a suggestive picture comes before the inner sense. The lines that provoke Mr. Lal to the utmost sarcasm are—

*Life was not there but an impassioned force,  
Finer than fineness, deeper than the deeps.*

The second line is an echo of a turn we find at times in some Upanishads, it is a sort of paradoxical pointing of extremes and is not devoid of attractiveness or effectiveness: here it is particularly apt because the soul, in Yogic realisation, is the inmost entity of the inner world and the subtlest of all subtle forces. The first line is deemed by Mr. Lal an attempt at Miltonese which succeeds in being mere wind. He is mistaken in both respects. Miltonese is more grandiose in language and less direct in suggestion. This is a straightforward style and statement expressing the truth that on the occult “plane” where Soul is the

determining principle there is a pure essence of vitality in both its ardent and its dynamic aspects, rather than what we know as Life Force. Of course, these lines and all the rest of the passage would hardly make an impact on a reader who has allowed the glib use of the word "soul" by wishy-washy and vacuous sentimentalists or by pseudo-mystics to spoil his stomach for it. Still less would an impact occur if a reader has from the very beginning no feel of what the soul could be like and looks upon every mention of it as a gaseous falsehood. Mr. Lal labours under a serious deficiency of soul-sense. Most non-mystic readers are somewhat in the same case, but not all lack so completely a sympathetic instinct for something which to the mystic is more "close, blissful, concrete, wonderfully true" (a phrase, by the way, very felicitously worded and rhythmed) than even his bodily existence. Mr. Lal himself says *vis-à-vis* the passage: "I see nothing; there is nothing I can hang on to." This could just as well be because of his own superficiality as because of the supposed lack of poetry in the lines.

Not that Sri Aurobindo is here at his best. But if we admit that Sri Aurobindo is perhaps here at his worst we still pay him a tremendous compliment. For the lines, by their harmonious significance and word and rhythm, remain poetry for all their falling below such bursts of inspiration as we quoted earlier—and even those examples cannot provide a really adequate notion of the sustained splendours *Savitri* has to offer nor of the huge variety of poetic merit in it, passages of a spiritualised "natural

magic" and mysticised "human interest" as well as Yogicised philosophy and direct occult insight into the individual and the cosmos. Yes, the lines remain poetry and become more poetic when taken in their proper context as part of a fuller record in which is set alive before us an actual experience of the plane of the World-Soul. Terms like "soul-stuff" and "sky of soul" and "deep soul-ground" acquire a degree of concrete meaning that cannot arise when the passage is torn from what goes before and comes after and when no indication is supplied of the totality of which it is an integral and almost inseparable portion.

Mr. Lal does injustice to the passage by the way he has presented it and the attitude he adopts towards it. But the worst crime he commits against the critic's office is to choose from Sri Aurobindo a passage that is not plenarily Aurobindonian, and declare it to be all that Sri Aurobindo is capable of throughout the nearly thirteen thousand lines published in Volume I of *Savitri*. This is an act of *suppressio veri* and *suggestio falsi*, betraying a want of scruple added to limitation of aesthetics. No doubt, *Savitri* is not always easy to appreciate, it is mostly a new kind of poetry with a vision and language caught as if directly from hidden heights and depths and breadths of a more than human consciousness. Sri Aurobindo himself felt that it would take time to obtain wide recognition. But for an unprejudiced reader of quick, supple and penetrating imagination there is enough in it of recognisable excellence to win for its author the richest

laurels—especially among his countrymen who may be expected to respond more readily to a sovereign spiritual utterance.

If, however, every Indian reader turns out to be like Mr. Lal, I can only sigh and quote two lines—"a state of tension produced in a refined sensibility" and "language used precisely, nobly and with a sense of purpose", I suppose—from one of Mr. Lal's own recent and definitely non-Aurobindonian poems:

*Here in dejection  
I don't know what to do.*

## The Central Sarojini

INDEED we have lost many things with the passing of Sarojini Naidu, but what exactly was her central quality, what constituted the very heart of her genius? It is always desirable to ask such a question, for in answering it we get clear of the plethora of conventional or merely emotional panegyric, arrive at the true nature of our loss and, by arriving at it, are best enabled to keep astir in ourselves what the departed greatness had most attempted to evoke.

The central Sarojini is summed up in the words: happy visionary. The description must not mislead us. It does not mean a dweller in either the ivory tower or the fool's paradise. Sarojini was always possessed of a finely shrewd practical sense and she knew also the humiliations and sorrows that are inseparable from life, especially the life of a nation like India which had been so long subject to foreign rule. Perhaps she was too keenly alive to common reality and the general misery of man; else she would never have launched from poetry into politics. What is meant by being a happy visionary is simply that even in politics she always remained a poet.

A poet is primarily a seer of hidden perfections at once beckoning earthly things to their own luminous har-

monies and reaching out to earth with those high rhythms. The thrill which accompanies this seerhood is a strange happiness that is never complacence and that, while full of laughter and love amidst the creatures and objects of the dust, is yet a creative criticism of them and, while acknowledging their value, points ever higher and often combines affection with irreverence, enthusiasm with a witty perception of frailties and foibles. Sarojini was very clearly and very uncomplicatedly poetic in mind and character. Hence the constant call of luminous dreams in all her public speech and gesture, the presence as of a colourful torch lifted above mortal heads though held in mortal hands. Whoever came into touch with her felt the delight of her beautiful conceptions, the charm of the splendid image she conjured up of India and the spirit in man and the objective of national and human labour. She did not have the master-secret of the political nation-builder, much less the power of the spiritual epoch-maker. But she could be a keen inspirer, and fill our hearts with a courageous glowing gaiety. This gaiety was a gift she alone could bring. None of our public leaders had anything like it to offer. Gandhi could instil great strength of moral purpose, Pandit Nehru a fine and wide idealism, Sardar Patel a bold dynamic drive for liberty. But the visionary intoxication which seemed to make all burdens drop was peculiar to Sarojini. And even leaders greater from the constructive and energetic point of view were avid of this intoxication, for it took the edge off difficulties which the reasoning

mind could not help taking too seriously. Sarojini did not overlook difficulties but she rendered them transpicuous, as it were, and showed a refreshing and resplendent future beyond them.

Her courageous glowing gaiety made her independent also of dull formalities, awed restraints, long-faced puritanisms. She was on the alert to find occasions for wit and did not bother if it drew the blush to anyone's cheek. A crowd of students pressed around her at the Madras Station some years ago and many asked for her autograph. One enthusiast came up and said proudly, "Mrs. Naidu, I am thoroughly acquainted with your biology. It is so thrilling." He meant, of course, biography. Sarojini looked up, winked at him and said, "But don't you go and tell my husband". Perhaps her most characteristic stroke of inhibitionless wit was her description of Gandhi: "My Micky Mouse of a Master". There is in it, in a familiar mood, the whole happy visionary that she was. Though the purple of the singing robe is not openly there, the central poetic imagination is in marked play. The sharp seeing eye has taken in the physical appearance with intense originality. There is also the sense of how the earthly form of things is so often a travesty of the inner being. And yet the recognition is present of even a caricature's capacity to transmit the brightnesses and nobilities of the soul if a harmonious and integrating imagination is brought to bear upon it. Somehow that comic phrase catches Gandhi's presence with a warm intimacy because of the very incongruity of

the term "Micky Mouse" with the term "Master", and the alliteration serves to telescope the two and reveal an underlying oneness which gives a piquant yet dignified depth to whatever resemblance Gandhi's anatomy bore to Walt Disney's creation. Perhaps the playful child-vein in Gandhi is also underlined most vividly and disclosed as being part and parcel of all that was venerable in him.

If we can keep alive Sarojini's happy visionariness in both its majestic and mischievous aspects we shall have saved much from the funeral pyre.

## A Defence of Hinduism

RECENTLY a well-known leader of the scheduled classes announced his desire to embrace Buddhism because of the lot of the "untouchables" in Hindu society—a lot which seemed to him a pointer to a lack in Hinduism of the sense of human brotherhood. He also declared that if Hinduism bore the caste system for several centuries it had failed "to yield anything substantive." According to him, Buddhism stands in striking contrast to this religion.

What shall we say to these highly "allergic" criticisms? The institution of untouchability was indeed a stain on the social scheme that had got established in India. But with the advent of the modern age the conscience of the best Hindus has always rebelled against it. As far back as the days of Ram Mohan Roy the progressive movement started and reform organisations like the Brahmo-Samaj and the Arya-Samaj fought untouchability for decades on end. The biggest uproar against it came from a Hindu—Gandhi. And the Indian Constitution which expresses a good deal of the contemporary Hindu mind has abolished untouchability. It is absurd to claim that untouchability is part and parcel of Hinduism. It is certainly no part of those foundational scriptures of the Hindus: the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Gita. In ancient India the castes were guilds for different crafts.

and professions, with no odious distinctions or taboos. Later they got rigid. In the days of India's decline they became more and more obnoxious, particularly by thrusting several millions outside the pale. But even when we condemn the injustice to so many it is well to remember that injustice of this type in general is not something peculiarly associated with Hindu society. Will Durant, the famous American writer on civilisation and culture, pointedly asks: "Does the attitude of a Brahmin to a Pariah differ, except in words, from that of a British lord to a navvy, or a Park Avenue banker to an East Side huckster, or a white man to a negro, or a European to an Asiatic?" What is clear from Durant's question is that there is a deplorable tendency in human nature towards unjust discrimination. And a social structure with Buddhism as the religious ingredient of it is as likely as a Hindu or a Christian society to become gradually stratified and to develop superiorities and inferiorities. If Buddha preached brotherhood, so did Christ and so did the ancient Hindu seers and saints. In fact the essential oneness of all things, the basic equality of all creatures was never so forcefully declared as by the mystics of Hinduism who saw the Divine everywhere.

### *The Genuine and the Spurious in Hinduism*

In viewing historical India, both past and present, it is necessary to distinguish between the genuine and the spurious in the Hindu religion. Opposed to the fear-

infested, delusion-darkened hotchpotch that is the masses' spurious Hinduism, there is the splendid many-sided unity of the genuine one, a grand harmony of a thousand truths. Its fundamental tenet is the old Rig-Vedic formula: "The One whom the sages call by many names." Unity and multiplicity, simplicity and complexity, the supra-cosmic and the cosmic, the universal and the individual—all these are blended together in Hinduism and express themselves in the large number of aspects our country's culture and social life possess. A million gods revealing and concretising a million facets of the inexhaustible Divine and of the infinite Eternal, a supreme trinity-in-unity personalising the creative, preservative and destructive qualities of the Supra-cosmic putting forth the cosmos and incarnating Himself again and again in the world, an ultimate Mother-force or Shakti bringing out for manifestation the secrets of the one Lord and Master of all existence—this is Hinduism. And it is also Hinduism that man can experience and realise the Divine, become unified with the Infinite, act as a channel of the Eternal, for man is in essence the Supreme and man's nature can be through Yoga a form of the Supreme's dynamic. Hinduism recognises three Yogas to suit the three types of men—the intellectual, the emotional, the kinetic—and the Bhagwad Gita combines the three Yogas in a synthesis. What is more, it throws the synthesis open to all without distinction. To realise the One everywhere and see the One in the Many as well as the Many in the One is the goal of the Hindu mystic, the climax of the

Hindu religious experience. And Sri Krishna in the Gita declares that even a Chandala, a scavenger, can become a knower of God and stand with the highest.

In the face of such a declaration and doctrine it is difficult to understand how anybody could identify genuine Hinduism with an inflexible as well as tyrannous caste system and the belief in untouchability. Beverley Nichols committed an indeed mountainous "howler" when he said, after talking of reforming Hinduism, that if by reform you knocked the caste system and untouchability out of it you would find that there was nothing left to reform. But regrettably enough some Hindus themselves have made too much of a song about the evil of untouchability. The most well-known of them said: "I would rather that Hinduism perished than untouchability survived." This amounts to making Hinduism stand or fall by pariahdom. In other words, one would be satisfied even if there were no such spiritual inspiration in the country as breathed and lived in a Vasishtha or a Yajnavalkya, a Chaitanya or a Mirabai, a Tukaram or a Tulsidas, a Ramakrishna or a Vivekananda—provided there were no scheduled classes! One may inquire what sort of life would there be on earth without the rishis, the saints, the mystics, the yogis. Man would be just a higher kind of brute or, rather, a worse kind of brute, since he would have nothing of the innocence of the animals but only their ferocity developed and gilded by a soulless reasoning ingenuity. Admittedly, religion which gives birth to the

Beatific Vision in some may also degenerate in others to cruel bigotry and hidebound superstitious caste-ridden orthodoxy: we have to be on guard and strive ever for its pure and clear and luminous manifestation, but to be prepared to throw away its higher reaches merely because it has also lower ones that accommodate things like untouchability is to be victimised by a hysteria of humanism. Humanism is a very worthy sentiment and creed, yet it cannot be balanced against spiritual experience, against God-realisation, against concrete communion with the Eternal. Hinduism stands or falls primarily and essentially by its ability to produce embodiments of such experience, realisation and communion. Although a vast brotherhood, a profound parity as between all classes, is indeed one of its tenets, this brotherhood and parity is a tenet not of mere sociology but of a spirituality which is rooted in the universal Self of selves or the single Lord whose undying sparks are all evolving souls. To be ready to forego this spirituality just because the social structure within which it first flourished and still flourishes has become decadent in many respects and is resistant in many ways to the influence of spirituality—to value more the abolition of untouchability than the existence of the God-knowers and God-lovers who open up for man the possibilities of a further evolution: this is a capital mistake, a loss of right proportion, a blurring of correct perspective, a depreciation of the force that alone can in the long run put a radical rather than a superficial and therefore temporary end to the iniquities that in different shapes are the sad lot of

millions not only in India but also abroad and even in countries where Buddhism is practised. It is another form of the heresy that if Hinduism bore the caste system for several centuries it has failed "to yield anything substantive."

### *Buddhism and Hinduism*

Here we may remind our recent critic that in the very religion he wished to embrace, in Buddhism itself, it is not Buddha's humanism that is the living core: the heart of his message is Nirvana, the direct experience of an undifferentiated superhuman infinity and permanence beyond all phenomena—an experience, by the way, which is nothing essentially new to ancient Hinduism. "As the taste of water from all the seas is salt," said Buddha, "so too the taste of all my teachings is Nirvana." Remove Nirvana from Buddhism and you rob Buddha's own life of its central significance. Buddha did not come merely to state the equality of human beings: his chief mission was to inculcate and irradiate a spiritual realisation lifting us far beyond humanity and his very emphasis on human equality was born of his mystical perception of the limitless immutable Presence in which earth and life and man can be submerged and the cycles of time transcended. If Buddhism has yielded "anything substantive", the main proof according to Buddha would lie not in whether it has yielded the savour of a society without the caste-system

but in whether it has yielded the taste of Nirvana. The main proof, under different appearances, is exactly the same as in the Hinduism that has been castigated.

However, as we have said, there is a subtle trend among Hindus themselves to exaggerate social values and thus play into the hands of critics of Hinduism. In one sense we may say the trend is towards Buddhism, for Buddhism is more prone than any other religion to be interpreted, in spite of its founder's aim and teaching, as a secular system. It does away with all metaphysical inquiry and discourages every metaphysical statement. It is a spiritual version of what has become known in the present-day West as Operationalism. According to the Operationalist canon, we stick only to that which can be demonstrated by a series of experimental operations, an employment of laboratory techniques, a manipulation of scientific apparatus. No assertions are to be made about ultimate reality since scientifically we cannot go beyond the evidence of physical instruments that measure phenomena. Similarly in Buddhism a psychological technique is provided: shedding of desire, rejection of the ego-sense, equanimity in face of all beings and happenings, practice of universal compassion, inner meditative detachment from both mental and bodily processes. This technique is spirituality and what it gives is liberation from sorrow and ignorance. The liberation should be described by no positive labels like Brahman, Atman or Ishwara: it can be labelled only in a negative manner as Nirvana which means cessation or absence of the interminable Becoming which

is the world. The primal facts to be reckoned with are, in Buddha's view, world and non-world. The splendours of mystical nomenclature, the sublime entities of spiritual scripture, the metaphysical ultimates of religious hymnody and liturgy are absent and in their place is a super-pragmatism. In reality, of course, Buddha under the Bo Tree or moving amidst his monks or preaching to the populace is enhaloed by a mystical light, fused with a spiritual Ineffable, himself an embodiment of a deathless freedom that is beyond the world. But the formula and method of Buddhahood are severely practical and "operational." And just one step more after the refusal to commit oneself to any metaphysics, even while being spiritual, is to ignore the implicit metaphysics altogether and concentrate on a self-discipline in altruism serving an ordered society: the spirituality shades off into social ethicism and secular morality and we have merely the ideals of truthfulness and non-violence, integrity and fraternity. The nameless peace of Nirvana becomes the happiness-giving principles of kindness and concord. Hinduism is hard to divest of its divine mysteries, difficult of secularisation in the modern meaning of the term: emphasis on humanism. It can be made secular only in the sense of a God-realisation countenancing no narrow religiosity and encouraging a turn to this-worldly work: it can never be separated from the superhuman Presence. Certain sections of modern India, unable to break away wholly from that Presence yet wanting increasingly, under the influence of the West, to be

secular, have found in Buddhist gestures and symbols a means of striking some kind of balance. They have brought about the adoption of the Dharma Chakra for the national flag and the Lion of Sarnath for the State Seal. This choice is due to a particular turn of the *Zeitgeist* and not because Buddhism is a religion superior to Hinduism. Our critic is therefore quite off the mark when he uses it to bolster up the religion which he prefers. Also the choice is due rather to a defect in the modern Indian temperament than to any special merit in the Buddhist creed, or to any true appreciation of that creed by this temperament. To overlook Nirvana—Nirvana without which Buddha would have regarded his teaching as worthless—is scarcely to appreciate Buddhism. And a religion which allows with some ease its deepest meaning to be overlooked can certainly not be considered grander or more effective. Ancient India could not permanently embrace Buddhism partly because of this ambiguity, this weakness, arising from a negative approach which has two undesirable effects. First, it frustrates the mind's *svabhava* to make philosophical formulations and give justifiable patterns for the life-force to follow. Second, it leaves the world without any strong supporting truth of itself in the Ultimate Reality: that Reality becomes more the world's annulment than its fulfilment—and the world naturally acquires a tendency to fall away from thought of it. The glorious personality of Buddha and the great experience he embodied remained stamped on the Indian mind, so much so that he was included in the

list of the Avatars and put beside Sri Rama and Sri Krishna, but after a few glowing centuries the religion he propagated lost its grip and died out.

*The Hindu View and Way of Life*

The inclusion of Buddha among the Avatars and at the same time the rejection of his religion as unfit for wholesale acceptance are facts that can be taken as clues to special qualities in Hinduism which have escaped completely the mind of the critic but which answer to the Indian soul's need and against which Buddhism could not stand long. Buddhism could never have taken into its scheme Sri Rama or Sri Krishna. It is, like most other religions, a one-track move towards the Eternal. Hinduism is multitudinous and multifarious, catholic and synthetic, a cosmos of creeds and experiences. It is a gigantic diversity driving, by a secret similarity within each variant, towards the same yet manifold Godhead. Its culture too is myriad-aspected: no line of thought anywhere, no scheme of ethics, no system of worship, no style of art, but finds here its place in the wondrous whole. The wideness and variety that are held together in a loose 'yet living and interlinked combination by the Hindu view and way of life' are responsible for the almost utter lack of religious intolerance we observe in Indian history. Vivekananda was but voicing the Hinduism of the ages when he said that there should be as many religions as there are individuals; and we may add

that every one of these religions could be called Hindu! Not that there is in Hinduism a welter of doctrines: there is only a recognition of the infinite possibilities of the omnipotent divine nature and the extreme multiplicity of frail aspiring human nature. All that Hinduism asks is: Can you in any manner realise the Supreme Being who is at once transcendent, universal and individual and whose modes of manifestation are myriad? Without the least violation of its own character it can take the essence of the religion of Buddha to its bosom, even as it can take that of Christianity or Mohammedanism. Each of them can be a note in the complex harmony of its heavenward cry. But neither Buddhism nor Christianity nor Mohammedanism can take Hinduism into itself. They are intent on converting all souls to one type and to confine the illimitable and protean Spirit to a single formula and a solitary revelation. None of them, therefore, can truly satisfy, or gain wholesale acceptance from, the Indian consciousness which wants spiritual life abundant. Life abundant, whether spiritual or secular, cannot exist for long in a one-track scheme.

It is also in the instinctive surge of the genuine Indian consciousness towards a complex harmony that we find the original *raison d'être* of the caste system which our critic falls foul of. The caste system has been for centuries a sore on the body of this fair country, but the fact that Hinduism evolved the caste system and that Buddhism is devoid of it is not to the credit of the latter. What, after all, is the basis of the

system? It is a recognition of the non-uniformity of human nature rooted in the multi-aspectedness of the Divine's being and action and an attempt to make the non-uniformity work with the utmost efficiency. Human nature falls into four main functions: the seeking of knowledge, inner and outer, and the giving of form and body to the truths of the universe—the seeking to exercise strength and power and the capacity to attack and defend, to lead and rule—the seeking to produce wealth, promote trade, secure the physical well-being of society—the seeking to serve and obey and exercise the capacity to do manual labour. The four functions are crystallised in the Brahmin, the Kshatriya, the Vaishya, the Sudra. Of course, no human being is entirely one-functioned and room must be left in any social system for passage from one group to another. But a clear division too is, under certain circumstances, required to stabilise society and promote the intensest development of each function by means of a conducive environment, association and training. In ancient India a rare combination of flexibility with fixity was nearly achieved, but as such a combination is very difficult to maintain a decline took place and when the national life was in danger owing to internal decadence and external invasion the strata or classes or castes grew rigid not only as a result of an ebb in the true spirit of Indian civilisation but also in consequence of conditions threatening Indian society with chaos. The caste system as it lingered on up to now was more or less a harmful and superficial institution, but in its origin as a

number of guilds it was a creation of much wisdom and also carried a spiritual colour which at the same time infused the highest values into every stratum and rendered different classes equal in essential status by that infusion. Even the sub-Sudras who took up the most servile labour, the work of scavenging, and who in course of time became the outcasts, the untouchables, had their own dignity and spiritual significance and were never debarred from getting into the higher strata, even into the highest, by showing a capacity at variance with their environment, association and training. Modern conditions do not favour clear divisions and today Hinduism is striving to drop them, especially as they have become a mockery of their old selves, but in the ages when they were laid down they were a really fruitful and "substantive achievement" and even now their essential truth has to be brought into play in a new revolutionary fashion rather than denied, denounced and neglected.

Hinduism, however, does not need for its own justification any kind of defence of the caste system. Were this system a total blunder Hinduism would still not stand condemned. Human nature is such a *mélange* that a mighty truth and a huge mistake can exist side by side, and the mightier the truth the more danger there can be of misgrowths occurring on levels where a truth is likely to get perverted in proportion to its being vast and rich and multifoliate. Whatever the results, we have to move in the direction of vastness and richness and multifoliate ness, for these alone can provide us with the final key to life's

riddle and challenge. These are qualities that not only cope with the tremendous diversity on a basis of unity that is the cosmic play, but also afford *lebensraum* for new developments, adventurous advances, undreamt-of discoveries. Most religions catch hold of certain aspects of the Divine to suit a particular penchant of the human mind. They may show a remarkable intensity engendered by the stress and the limit under which they work, but immensity gets sacrificed. Hinduism aspires to mingle the immense with the intense and, though the fusion is not always complete and there is a preponderance one way or the other, it succeeds in carrying both in some sort of alliance and in keeping the path open for some future fusion. Not dominantly the logic of the dividing intellect under the Spirit's inspiration but a spiritually inspired intuitive logic which welcomes divisions only to unify them and which tends secretly towards some novel integral harmony of the utmost unity with the utmost multiplicity—this is the motive power behind the millennial quest of the Absolute which began with the Vedic rishis. Infinite vistas stretch out to be explored, startling possibilities of evolution remain to be compassed—essential Hinduism has its doors flung wide to ever-new surprises of the inexhaustible will of the single yet manifold Being who is the ultimate reality. It is through these doors that the soul of man will pass into a future of supreme fullness.

## To the Refugees of East Bengal

EVERY Indian heart aches in sympathy with your sufferings. You who have come over to India after seeing your fathers and mothers and brothers and sisters and sons and daughters murdered or mutilated or dishonoured—you who have left your money and your property behind and borne innumerable hardships and humiliations on the bitter way from your age-old homes—you have indeed drained the cup of human sorrow to its dregs. Hell has been your lot and for a long time to come you will not have passed out of the misery into which you have fallen. Even when there is some rehabilitation you will bear terrible marks on your lives, wounds that may seem to have healed but whose ugly scars will lie across all your days. We who have been lucky enough to be on the hither side of the partition that has left this ancient country sick in soul welcome you with open arms and we shall exert every nerve to give you help. In the great struggle for India's freedom your families have fought side by side with us and if we fail to do the utmost we can by way of assistance we shall have betrayed the ideals that have served us as beacons in the past.

But material provision to the best of our ability is not all we should offer you. Bread and water and a roof over the head are indeed life's necessities. They must come

to you immediately and various organisations have been started to see that they do come. But your problem is not only that of the famished body. Nor is it fully solved when we find you suitable occupations. Even if we could restore you to a state of prosperity—a task which appears well-nigh impossible for several years—we shall not have solved your problem in entirety. For, you are minds as well as bodies and what has happened to you is not just a physical catastrophe. You are thinking beings and probably your gruesome experience will tinge your whole attitude to life. And though we are straining to help you in things material the unavoidable difficulty of meeting the needs of a million unfortunates must take long to be overcome and will make you despair often and may breed in you a sense of hopelessness. To the keen anxiety darkening your thoughts, to the feeling of frustration gnawing at your hearts, what words of light shall we bring?

The first truth to remember is that there is within man a strength which, if summoned, can bear him victoriously through every calamity. This is the strength of the central self in him which refuses to accept defeat. He may have lost all that is ordinarily prized, but this strength is of something that can dissociate its flame-force from the whole outer being's fallen and ruined condition. Detached, poised, secure in a mighty and lofty pride, aware of life's inviolable quintessence in the sheer act of self-consciousness, this central personality has stood unbroken in many an historical

figure and cast its brave colour on all external disadvantages and disasters, robbing them of the power to crush the dignity and the joy that are man's rights as a creature developed beyond the animal's uncontrolled reflex and response to circumstance. One of the extreme instances of it in history was Belisarius, the greatest general during the reign of the Roman emperor Justinian. Both he and his master had the ill-luck to get ensnared by dancing girls whom they subsequently married. The new empress—mean of birth—grew frantically jealous of his influence and his achievement and conspired his downfall. She had him degraded—all his honours plucked from him and his authority taken away. Later, his wife in whom he had put absolute trust ran away with a dissolute monk. In the end the once famous soldier in whose celebration an Arch of Triumph had been built in Byzantium was reduced to beggary. He lost even his sight, and used to be observed standing under his own Arch of Triumph—a friendless pauper living on alms. But neither external humiliation nor poverty nor the blight of blindness made him feel that fate had been cruel to him. His face had ever the look of a leader of men, the general who had won so many victories was yet defiant in his features. An inherent greatness he was aware of, in the midst of all adversities, as being his true individuality, consisting of the realisation so finely phrased by Longfellow:

*The unconquerable will*

*This too can bear—I still  
Am Belisarius.*

This realisation is not the mere bravado or rigid resistance of egoism. There is no selfish assertiveness in it, no rancour for wrongs done, no desire for aggrandisement at the expense of others. Nor is it pure rebelliousness, the force of the fallen archangel depicted by Milton, the hard hate for whatever opposes. A certain peace is here, commingled with power—the result of an intuition of some unchanging inner reality in the midst of earth's vicissitudes. The intuition is not perfect, for it is still in terms of the human personality, no matter if what is felt is that personality's centre and core. But behind the intuition is the soul of man, an immortal spark of divinity, capable of being one with the freedom and bliss of the Eternal, endowed with the possibility of drawing into the frail outer nature not only the deep happiness of the inmost being but also the help, the inexplicable and almost miraculous intervention, of the Supreme Lord of the universe.

We Indians have made history as seekers of the Divine. Not in material things only but much more and fundamentally in things of the Spirit have we reposed our trust. Even the presiding genius of our nation, the One whom we feel as the Mother-Soul whose children are the many millions inhabiting this great land, even the National Being we have invoked as a delegate or aspect or emanation of the Ultimate Spirit. God is the secret ether in

which we have lived down the ages and without our awareness of this pervading light and truth our end would have come long ago as came the death of the old civilisations of Europe and the Middle East. And in the days of the comparative decline that was ours in the near past it was always the sense of Durga the Divine Mother or Krishna the World-preserved that has been our main-stay, our fountain of energy. The entire struggle against British domination was inspired by no ordinary patriotism but by a spiritual vision—the vision of the Eternal and the Infinite to whom the earliest makers of our culture, the Rishis, pledged the people who lived at the foot of the immense Himalayas, with oceans flanking them on right and left. And the ancient pledging could take place precisely because the Rishis were not passing wonders but the natural flowering of a seed found in the whole race, the high crests of a surge sweeping through the Indian consciousness. It is spiritual India that has attained greatness in times gone by and that has fought for freedom against the alien rulers. All the best that has happened to us or been created by us was born of our instinct of the Divine. And that is why this best has been so extraordinary a phenomenon, with a quality unique in the earth's annals. Through that instinct we shall emerge in the world's future as a leader of the nations towards unity and harmony and manifold fulfilment. Also, our miseries and eclipses have been due to un-faithfulness to that instinct or else to a turning of it in the direction of other-worldliness instead of in the direc-

tion of God's manifestation here and now. If we are true to our characteristic genius we shall never decline and all seeming declines will only be temporary phases. At present, there is a crisis in our country—not basically economic or political but psychological and it consists in our being divided in mind about what makes Indianness. A shallow scepticism, a preoccupation with superficial factors, a watering down of genuine ethics to weak moralism and sentimental pacifism, a false kind of secularity which forgets that the true secularity for India can lie only in a wide tolerant multi-faceted all-comprehensive plastic and dynamic spirituality—these things have obtained sway over half our mind and the other half that is alive to the Divine's presence is unable to find voice and orientate our interests and occupations towards the light that in Saint and Seer and Yogi is still burning amongst us. Because of failure in many responsible quarters to keep bright the instinct of divinity and to live bravely in its ancient unifying force and to develop the country according to the authentic temper of Indian culture great misfortunes have visited thousands and thousands of the country's inhabitants. These misfortunes cannot in their totality be removed with ease. Therefore it would be misguiding to hold out vast hopes to suffering men in their masses. But the way open to us is that as many individuals as possible should awaken to the Sovereign Spirit that has been our lodestar and lover through the millenniums.

Every cry rising to heaven from the deep heart is one

blow the more struck at the darkness in which are plunged the ten lakhs of you, refugees of East Bengal, who have crossed over into India. Each of you, look within, quest the calm centre of your troubled personality, face with it the hardships surrounding you, pierce through it to the genuine inmost soul that effortlessly breathes God as the body breathes air, dwell in its spontaneous aspiration and call down the help that is ever waiting and shall never fail. Nothing spectacular may take place immediately, even the signs of the help may not show for a while, but behind the scenes and soon enough in the very foreground of your lives the radiant presence will be working. All the more puissantly will it work since not only from invisible heights where the perfect Transcendent Spirit dwells or from the amplitudes that are the home of the Cosmic Consciousness the response will come, but also from individual embodiments of both these splendours, living masters of Yoga toiling for the world's good, self-dedicated dynamos of the Divine's electricity of ecstasy and omnipotence. In our midst are mighty souls that have grown one with the eternal mysteries, the supernatural mights of which our scriptures have spoken. Through them as through shining doorways the Infinite moves out to the world, a constant influence, a persistent sweetness and vigour that is not dependent on office or authority but freely flows forth to all the corners of the earth and is most intense in the country where those doorways stand carved. Take the names of these great ones who are here to father and mother a new humanity. Open yourselves

to them, call to them for succour; let the Divine, whose manifestations they are, fold you in the unseen embrace which is more delightful and more life-giving than any ministration of mere man. Nothing else than the Supreme whom the India of history has sought and served and who has never forsaken His child can bring the healing balsam to your wounds of mind as well as body. O ill-starred refugees, He alone is your true refuge. No idle words do we offer you, but the verity of verities. And surely you who are sons and daughters of Bengal must know that only this message is your saviour and the *mantra* of India's greatness and unity, for was it not Bengal's flesh and blood that gave birth to Chaitanya, to Ramakrishna, to Vivekananda, to Sri Aurobindo?

## **The Real Gandhi: An Impartial Estimate of His Greatness**

IN psycho-analytic practice there is a well-known method of testing our instinctive responses, plumbing our spontaneous idea-associations. A number of carefully chosen words are spoken to us and we have to blurt out without a moment's thought the words that rise up in our minds. Well, if any Indian is psycho-analytically pelted with the term "Swaraj", the rebound in most cases will be the name "Gandhi".

You would say this is but natural. Yes, natural it is, since Gandhi stood in the forefront of the political scene here for the last three decades. And yet the response, the association is wrong. There would be the right response and association if there were the mention of a leader like Tilak who bent his whole leonine energy towards the attainment of Swaraj, who was a Swarajist first and last, who had no other life-passion than to free India from the British and who considered all means legitimate in breaking the fetter of foreign domination. With Gandhi, Swaraj was never the be-all and end-all. No doubt, he wanted India to be politically independent, but never unconditionally, never by any kind of means. Either certain conditions must be observed by us, certain means adopted, or else no Swaraj was to be desired and worked for. There

was in Gandhi's vision an ideal which seemed to him larger than India's political freedom—and that ideal was what he strove after and sought to represent: if Swaraj could be subsumed under that ideal, if it could attune itself to this "greater glory", then alone was it worth having!

### *Not Swarajist but Humanist*

Gandhi was not first and last a patriot or a politician. He was above everything a moralist and humanist. What was his charge-sheet against the British rulers? A patriotic politician would announce that even if there were nothing to hold up against British rule on the score of moral or humane conduct, self-government would still be the goal: it must be won for its own sake because it is an inalienable right of every nation. Gandhi's attack on British imperialism was not essentially on the ground that India must be governed by Indians. It was rather on the ground that England had misgoverned India.

If the British sovereignty had really been what it claimed to be—*mabap raj*, fatherly and motherly rule—it is questionable indeed whether Gandhi would have launched into politics. He was at heart a champion of the down-trodden and the ill-treated, and his main accusation against John Bull was not the foreignness of the fellow but the crudity of the chap. And it is characteristic of Gandhi that, while not forgetting the political misdeeds, he gave prime place on his black list to the misdeeds that were economic.

After the first World War, he did not mention as the chief blot on British rule the Rowlatt Act, the Jallianwalla Massacre, the broken promise of the British Premier to the Muslims of India and the sham unsatisfactory reforms. He mentioned in words of the intensest fire and the most glaring light the appalling poverty which was the result of systematic exploitation of our masses by the British. In the celebrated trial in which he showed the causes of his disaffection for the Government, this deliberate impoverishing of the bulk of his people, this continual and cold-blooded degrading of millions below the bare subsistence level in order that a few might wax rich was declared to have principally alienated him from his masters. Even more characteristic of him was his grouping together with the crime of his masters the crime of his own countrymen who shared the exploiter's mentality and never scrupled about grinding the faces of the poor.

The passage is memorable, for in it is summed up the real Gandhi: "No sophistry, no jugglery in figures can explain away the evidence, the skeletons in many villages, present to the naked eye. I have no doubt whatsoever that both England and the town-dwellers of India will have to answer, if there is a God above, for this crime against humanity which is perhaps unequalled in history."

The castigation of the Indian exploiters, and not solely the British, is a clue that leads us straight to his most humanitarian campaign, the one against Untouchability—a campaign whose thrust was at the Indian

though the foreigner also was taken to task for setting up a separate electorate for the Untouchables and thus perpetuating them as a class. Gandhi's battle with conventional India ran parallel to his battle with John Bull. He solemnly thought his country deserved to be tyrannised over by the British because of the heinous sin she had committed for centuries against so many millions of her own people by looking down upon them as pariahs, as outside the pale of social intercourse, as worse than beasts of burden. Unless we set about putting our own house in order we are not fit to be free: this is what Gandhi said time and again. Never did he spare his countrymen the scorpion whip: he lashed them without fear, he stung them relentlessly into consciousness of guilt. He was no flatterer: he did not play up to his audience: he was a just and bold critic of India. Even about the scurrilous book by Miss Mayo he said that it was a book Englishmen should put out of their minds but Indians must take to heart, for though it was in many respects a malicious exaggeration with not half a glance to spare for the good side of our land, it did drive home a few facts, a few truths. And the worst fact, the most painful truth about us was, in Gandhi's eyes, Untouchability. To remove the bar sinister of the Untouchables was to be our duty side by side with removing the yoke of the Britisher, who was inclined to treat us as untouchables. "Fail in this moral and humane duty", said Gandhi in effect, "and you do not merit to be set free. Social reform must go hand in hand with work for

Swaraj: without social reform Swaraj is not worth a straw!"

*Can Non-violence be the Master Ideal?*

Nor is the attack on the pariah system the sole distinguishing mark of Gandhi being basically something else than an embodiment of Swarajism. There is the insistence, in season and out, on non-violence, *ahimsa*. According to him, we simply had to oppose the British for the economic as well as political chains put on us by them, but the chains had to be snapped in the right way and not the wrong. The moment we chose the wrong way we would forge worse chains for ourselves and it would be much better to endure the lesser evil than create the bigger. A man is truly man, in Gandhi's view, when he restrains himself and not when he retaliates. We must fight without rancour and without staining our hands with brute force. Every injustice has to be combated but unto one's own death, never unto the death of one's opponent. Blood must be spilled for a noble cause, but it must be our own blood. One remembers how at the height of his Civil Disobedience Movement in 1922, with the entire nation steeled to resist the British Government and bring the proud rulers to their knees, Gandhi cast away the prize nearly in his hands and stopped the campaign just because at Chauri Chaura the populace, inflamed by armed police repression, ran amuck and committed a few acts of gruesome violence.

This sudden drawing of reins by Gandhi brings out sharply the fact that as a politician he was not always the master-guide. What he did in 1922, like several other acts in his career as India's leader, was, from the political standpoint, short-sighted; he might have striven to check further violence without stemming the enthusiastic tide of nationalism and frustrating the highly wrought millions he commanded. Besides, the too acute recoil from violence of any kind is a dangerously confusing emotion, in a world where there are so many diabolic presences. The inadequacy of the dictate to abjure violence was most revealed when in the last war Gandhi advised England to fling off arms and melt Hitler's heart by letting him ride roughshod over her. Its defect was laid bare again with terrible vividness when he talked of India fighting the Jap invader with non-violence. He did not realise the threat to world-civilisation by the Fascist maniacs and how limited and ineffective complete non-violence would have been against their blind brutality. Beglamoured by his own pet doctrine, he could not see the Inferno that was the heart of Fascism and thought that here was only another form of the imperialistic ambition which had marched through history so often and which was never quite impervious to the influence of heroic self-sacrifice and passive resistance on its opponent's part. Many Indians committed the same mistake, but except the taking up of arms on behalf of Fascism nothing could have been more Himalayan a blunder than the pitting of *ahimsa* against a Hitler.

*Did Gandhi Embody the Soul of India?*

The idealisation of non-violence at all costs serves also to throw into relief the precise meaning of Gandhi's saying: "Politics are to me subservient to religion." If religion primarily signified to him non-violence, then it is doubtful whether he can stand wholly as a representative of what India has historically understood by religion. In the golden age of Indian spirituality, the Vedic times, the arts of war were not taboo. Even in the Ashrams of the Rishis archery was taught—surely not just to hunt animals (though that too would be contrary to non-violence). It was taught essentially in order to fit men for violence in a right cause. The emphasis was always on being right, not on being non-violent. The holiest figures in Indian tradition, Rama and Krishna, were mighty warriors and urged men to battle against the enemies of *dharma*. To explain away their fights as being allegories of inner struggle between man's higher self and his lower is to forget that in part of mankind the lower self is not only dominant but also aggressive against those in whom the higher self is more active and that the inner struggle must necessarily get projected into an epic of physical combat. Even Buddha who among India's spiritual personalities put the greatest premium on non-violence did not enjoin it on all and sundry: he restricted it to the class of monks and, while conjuring humanity to return love for hatred, never discouraged violence in defence of a cause that was just.

The absolute adherence to *ahimsa* was derived by Gandhi from Tolstoy: it does not reflect the flexible and many-sided spiritual wisdom of original Hinduism.

There is also another fact which leads us to question whether Gandhi, for all his veneration of the Gita, embodied vitally the soul of the Hindu religion. It was not only Swaraj that he deemed undesirable without unsleeping agitation and activity to demolish the barrier between the Untouchables and the rest of our population: even Hinduism itself, the whole grand structure of spiritual aspiration towards the invisible Divine, was a mockery to Gandhi so long as that barrier was not torn down. One of his often-quoted utterances is that he would far rather that Hinduism died than that Untouchability lived! Here is an hysterical rushing to extremes by a conscience hypersensitive to social inequalities. Here is deplorable forgetfulness of the truth that, though social reformism is a fine passion, it cannot be the centre and core of man's upward endeavour. The main purpose of true religion is a change of the merely human consciousness into a divine consciousness by a progressive practice of the presence of God. Only when that presence is inwardly realised can social pestilences like Untouchability be radically removed. Till then, sincere efforts must certainly be made to abolish them by means of brotherly social behaviour, but to believe that a sore like Untouchability renders all Hinduism corrupt and futile and that, without the help of the fundamental transformation of consciousness that is Yoga,

the root and not only one or another outward form of social iniquity can be plucked out is to confuse morality with religion and to prove clearly that one lacks the burning essence of not only the Hindu religion but also of all religion—the mystical cry for the Eternal and the Infinite.

### *Gandhi and the True Spiritual Light*

In view of this it becomes impossible to speak of Gandhi, as so many do, in the same breath with Buddha or Christ. Christ and Buddha had an intensely developed social sense of brotherhood; but they had something more, and that something was not merely a mental and emotional acceptance of the Eternal and the Infinite as a sort of penumbra of the passion for social equality. Rather, this passion was radiated from a centre of consciousness that had deepened beyond the human into the immense reality of the Infinite and the Eternal. They were mystics, men who had Yogoically realised God whether in His impersonal aspect of Nirvana or in His personal aspect as Lord and Lover.

Our feeling, that Gandhi never had the mystical experience and the spiritual realisation, is borne out in full by a comparison of what mystics of various ages have left on record with what Gandhi put on paper about his own life. It is not possible to say that he may have kept silent about certain things: he made it a point to hide nothing, to confess and register whatever he ex-

perienced or did, and if any man's life was transparent to the world's eyes so far as his own knowledge of himself went, it was the life of Gandhi as described in his autobiography *My Experiments with Truth* and some other writings of his in the periodicals he edited. If Gandhi had gone through any mystical realisation, he would not have violated truth by omitting it from his account when he made it his professed aim to omit nothing. Of course, for the world to know that a man is a mystic the writing or declaring explicitly that he had gone through certain experiences is not necessary; there are other ways in which mysticism talks, manifests, comes into the open and it might be difficult to judge from this or that man's writings whether he was a mystic or no. But Gandhi—by setting up as his autobiographical ideal an account which lays open all important details, and by yet failing to lay open anything mystical in his self-portrayal—leaves no shadow of a doubt that he never was a mystic.

Merely to get promptings, as Gandhi said he did, from an inner voice does not constitute mysticism. "The still small voice" in the form of what is called conscience is a common possession: it becomes very imperative in some people, but there is no undeniable spirituality implied by it, even if one has practised self-control and tried to avoid dishonesty. A voice of conscience can arrive from various recesses of our being: it can be as often undivine as divine, and mostly it is neither in any specific sense, and not seldom there are several

kinds of voices in the same individual, creating quite a confusion in the long run. Occasionally a voice from within becomes an extraordinary phenomenon, as if it were an objective dictate from some guiding power outside or beyond us. In his entire life Gandhi knew this phenomenon only once: a voice suddenly woke him up in the middle of the night and whispered to him clear and cogent directions about a fast of twenty-one days in connection with certain social and political issues arising out of Untouchability. He wrote about it in *Harijan* a few years later (December 10, 1938) and ended with the words: "That kind of experience has never in my life happened before or after that date." The experience has been compared to those of the Saints. Even if it could be so compared, one such experience would not give a man the authentic mystical status. But in point of fact an experience like Gandhi's carries by itself no guarantee of a mandate from on high. Any distinctive occult phenomenon is not necessarily spiritual in origin any more than is an exceptionally willed abstinence or a keen urge towards philanthropy. The call received by Gandhi to fast has nothing in it similar to the voices and the visions that are revelatory incidents in the exalted sweep of the Saints into the "unitive knowledge" which transcends and transfigures the human consciousness.

Absence of mysticism does not prevent a man from being great, and Gandhi was great—but in the ethico-religious sphere, without the marked touch of the religio-

mystical sphere which takes up both mind and heart into a greater and more gracious life. Just as Gandhi was not primarily a patriot or a politician, he was also not fundamentally in the line of the illumined and ecstatic seers. It is these seers, these embodiments of spiritual realisation, who are the purest light of the world—and in that light has India of the ages striven most to live, and only by its gold of godhead will she be able to crown her long history and lead our broken half-blind earth to its fulfilment. Once we perceive this, we shall not fall into a blurring of values when we confront the future, for we shall be in a position to estimate correctly the significance of that frail yet unconquerable, ascetic yet compassionate figure who will have a deserved place in his countrymen's memory but to whom it was a mistake to give the mysticism-charged Upanishadic title of "Mahatma."

## Revivalism and Secularism

AGAIN and again in current Indian politics feelings have run high about the issue of the Secular State and the question has sprung to the fore: Should our country, with its huge Hindu majority, be revivalist or, because of its multi-communal character, secular?

If we are to see straight, the confusion which hangs round the terms "revivalism" and "secularism" must be cleared. People who call themselves progressive look upon all revivalist tendencies as if they were the plague: they understand these tendencies to be pure and unadulterated communalism. Intolerant Hindu sectarianism on the rampage is their notion of whoever seems to be a revivalist. It must be admitted that there is a good number of Hindu bigots and we cannot sufficiently emphasise their harmfulness. But two things must be kept in view when we condemn them. Most of these bigots are a reaction to the fanaticism that was the father of the Muslim League and therefore the progenitor of Pakistan. They are the unnatural consequences of a most unnatural phenomenon and are to a large extent a sort of defence mechanism against a menace that has kept on growing. To discourage them is indeed our duty, but if our stand is not equally strong against the root cause of their upsurge we fail to be realists. To expect

that no section of the Hindu community would indulge in reprisals for acts of injustice and brutality committed against Hindus in Pakistan is simply to be ignorant of human nature: the way to avoid retaliations is not merely to preach Gandhism to the masses or to punish those who take the law into their own hands but to add to all genuinely preventive or deterrent measures an attempt to stop the occasions of provocation. The second point to bear in mind about the Hindu sectarians is that in a perverse manner they suggest a truth which should never be neglected. Let us explain this seeming paradox.

### *The Hindu Sectarians and Essential Hinduism*

We catch the key to the paradox the moment we fix our eyes searchingly on the credo of the Hindu sectarians: "India is the land of Hinduism and the Muslims are Hinduism's enemies and must be kept under Hindu domination." The perversity here is, of course, the undemocratic idea of domination of one community by another. To discriminate between communities within a country is to sow the seeds of Hitlerism. The fullest equality not only on constitutional paper but also in living practice must be there. Some perversity can be read too in the belief that the Muslims are Hinduism's enemies. Although unfortunately an anti-Hindu virus has been working in the Muslim community owing to the machinations of fanatics and especially since Jinnah

brought forward the two-nation theory and caused the sanguinary commotion that culminated in Pakistan, one cannot tar all Muslims with the same brush. Out of the three and a half crores residing in India many see clearly the folly of the country's partition and wish to cultivate friendly relations with the Hindus amongst whom they live. The mere fact that the Muslim religion does not see eye to eye with the Hindu religion in several doctrinal matters need not be taken as any direct antagonism between communities. But a great truth is enshrined in the statement that India is the land of Hinduism. If we forget this truth and seek to create a country with all psychological and metaphysical and spiritual colour of Hinduism wiped off, we shall seriously thwart India's growth and make the nation either a mediocrity or a monstrosity instead of a light to the whole world.

Let us, however, hasten to declare that by Hinduism we do not mean the present form of the caste system or the old marriage laws or any specific orthodox convention. The giving of central place to cow-preservation as if the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Gita boiled down to abstention from cow-slaughter is also far from our meaning. If there are sound arguments in favour of sparing every cow, we may certainly practise cow-protection—and in any case we should cease from the cruelty of yoking bullocks to two-wheeled carts that throw extra pressure on the poor animal's necks—a cruelty which strangely enough is seldom noticed by cow-worshippers. But it is ridiculous to put cow-protection at the very centre of

Hinduism: a man may go on protecting cows all his life and yet be a most deplorable Hindu if the far greater elements of the Hindu religion are neglected as perhaps more often than not they are.

Hinduism means essentially to live in constant sense, ultimately rising to continual realisation, of the Divine Being, infinite and eternal, from whom emanates this universe and who dwells within it as well as beyond it as its single yet multifarious Self and Sovereign. Hinduism implies essentially the progressive irradiation of one's whole life down to the most physical movements by the Divine Being's supra-intellectual Consciousness and Delight. Not only inner but outer, not only static and peaceful but dynamic and creative regeneration in terms of that Consciousness and that Delight is the aim and goal of Hinduism. A direct all-round turn towards supra-intellectual experience—a concrete mystical and Yogic trend of the widest order—is therefore the final definition of being a Hindu. The phrase "widest order" has importance, for it distinguishes the ideal Hindu God-knower and God-lover from the ideal mystics of other religions in two ways: most religions draw a line between spiritual and secular and feel that God is the business of certain parts of our being and not the be-all and end-all of our entire life, and most religions confine themselves to a particular splendid formula of the deific and fight shy of certain sides of mystical experience—Christianity, for instance, of the pantheistic realisation or the realisation of absolute union between God and man, and Islam not only of these realisations

but also of the God with form as well as of the incarnate Godhead, the Avatar. Of course, there are some lines of Christian mysticism that escape here and there from these limits just as the Sufi developments of Islam do, but this is so because overtly or covertly the influence of Hinduism has been felt by them. Hence to be a Hindu, as distinguished from a Christian or Muslim or Jew or Zoroastrian or even Buddhist, is to be steeped in the tradition of a spirituality which, while admitting of various kinds of contact and communion with the Infinite Eternal and so granting the validity of various approaches according to temperament, holds the vision of an experience combining all approaches and all contacts and communions and is able to include and allow every sort of religious experience in even an exclusive form precisely because it holds that wide and comprehensive vision and keeps it at the back of all the differing experiences so that there is mutual understanding among them and a deep tolerance.

### *The Necessity of Progressive Revivalism*

Of Hinduism, thus defined, India is the land and all that is finest and grandest in our history has sprung from it. Not to put the utmost stress possible on this Hinduism is to castrate spiritually a people that has had the unique distinction of being one of the very few who have kept a living continuity with the hoary past and survived unimpoverished in cultural vitality. Try to take away or

relegate to the background the wonderful Hindu spirituality and you do your best to render India utterly impotent as a truly cultural force. That spirituality is the greatest historical fact in our country and it is the very core of India. It is also something that opens up the profoundest possibilities of human growth and provides the power for the next step in evolution—the change from mind to what Sri Aurobindo calls supermind as our established and effective status of consciousness. Unless a single Self in all creatures becomes a concrete experience, unless a derivation of every being from the one Divine Creative Person is inherent part of our life-sense, there can be no genuine brotherhood and harmony on earth. Other modes and means of promoting equality and peace are mere patching-up devices, temporary and restricted expedients or at best half-way houses to the basic spiritual unity-in-diversity. If we have any ideal before us of human perfection, individual and collective, the large and liberal and all-permeating Hinduism of which we have spoken is the world's prime necessity. Not for a moment must we forget or ignore the fact that India by the fundamentals of her Hinduism is the brightest hope of the earth's future.

To be a revivalist of this vastly transformative power is the duty of every Indian. And if secularism is the enemy of that power, then we must fight secularism tooth and nail. Such secularism is no authentic foe of the communalist mind but a destroyer of India and a destroyer too of the only foundation on which non-communalism

can be built with any lasting security. There is a tendency in officialdom to refrain from giving encouragement to anything which breathes markedly of Hinduism. Moral maxims from the Hindu scriptures are culled because they bear a resemblance to ethical aphorisms from other religions, but an openly religious and spiritual song like *Bande Mataram*—a cry of obeisance to the divine creative Power that is mother of the world and that is visioned as the ultimate being of the National Soul of India the God-intoxicated country—is made to play second fiddle to a much inferior though by no means crude national anthem which never inspired any heroism or sacrifice as the other constantly did during the course of our struggle for freedom. That *Bande Mataram* should ever have been challenged on the ground that it was too Hindu and not secular enough for a country where there were some millions of Muslims is a sad symptom of national decadence. Perhaps a still sadder one is the lukewarm apologia put up for it at times—namely, that the Goddess invoked should not worry anybody since nobody now believes in the reality of such a being and she can be taken as a harmless poetic metaphor for the motherland. Heaven save us from this kind of secularism! Secularism should mean nothing more than that every citizen of India is free to follow his beliefs, religious or non-religious, and has equal civic rights and that no discrimination will be made against him in any sphere because of his particular creed. It must never signify that India will not be regarded any longer as basically the land of Hinduism and that Hindu-

ism in its essentials will not be allowed to mould increasingly the life of the three hundred million people who have inherited it from the most glorious spiritual past any country can claim.

Here we may enter a *caveat*. Revivalism in so far as essential Hindu spirituality with its myriad-aspected realisation of both inner and outer truth is revived is a progressive force. But it should keep clear of sticking to past achievements and declaring that the *ultima thule* has been reached. New discoveries of the Supreme Spirit's hidden powers are always possible—or at least novel developments of known powers in order to carry further the transformative urge in man and bring it into tune with contemporary modern needs. Surely, it cannot be said that even India has completely found the secret of life's transformation. An immense inner enlightenment is not enough: the outer mind has to be more than merely purified and made plastic to the inner truth, the outer vitality has to be more than merely inspired by the inner dynamism, the outer physicality has to be more than made a mere medium of the inner stability—they have themselves to grow divine by the direct descent of some perfect counterpart of not only our selfhood but also our instrumental nature. Towards whatever spiritual discipline that would effect this complete change in us we have to move, for the whole many-sidedness of past Hinduism has no meaning if it bars an extension of the spiritual new-birth. Revivalism should never be a magnificent stagnancy.

### *Hinduism and Foreign Cultural Influences*

The point about stagnancy holds also in the matter of foreign cultural influences. We should refrain from shutting our doors to the wide world. Hinduism is the very opposite of a hermetically sealed culture, just as it is the reverse of a rigidly uniform religion. Not only is it many-strained, it is also remarkably assimilative and is even on the alert to draw new tones and rhythms into its harmonising organism. To think that by whittling our life down to indigenous products, whether material or psychological, we shall advance most the spirit of Hinduism is a capital error. Of course, our growth has always to be from within outwards, but our "within" need not be a fenced-off secrecy. There can be an Indian "within" that assimilates the essence of all cultural movements of the world, puts itself in connection with the time-spirit and is significantly modern without sacrificing any creative characteristic of its own. In fact, if Hinduism is to grow more powerful it should welcome the play of the whole world's thought and activity, enlarge its own scope of earth-knowledge, give to every department of human effort its true Godward drive and by a spiritual intuitiveness lead it to its finest fulfilment, so that at the same time Hinduism may be in the midst of living history and in vibrant touch with mankind as a whole and impart to the contemporary universe the typically Hindu light and colour which are of the deep divine Self of selves.

Amplitude, multiplicity, variety to the utmost on a basis of absolute unity—penetration of the entire world and absorption too of the world in its entirety—these are Hinduism's natural modes of being. And if these modes are not to be vitiated it is necessary to consider as a vital portion of our national life the English language. We may regard Hindi with a fostering care, we may try to spread it more and more, but let us not commit the blunder of attempting to cut out or atrophy what is now a natural organ of our culture-body and what to our good fortune is the vividest medium of the developing world-mind. When people all over the globe are wishing to make English more and more a part of their education we should not be foolish enough to diminish its actual established presence in our culture. English is now as much a language of India as any of the indigenous tongues. If it is not as well spoken by many of those who employ it as Tamil is by the South Indians or Hindi by the northerners, it is spoken by the south and the north, the west and the east of our sub-continent in a unifying nation-conscious manner as no Indian language is spoken. It is the language by which the political unity of our country has been historically formed, it is the language in which our whole battle for freedom has been fought, it is the language with which we have put India on the map of the world, it is the language of our best journalism and our rarest literature—Nehru has fashioned of it a gleaming mirror of his idealistic personality, Gandhi has effectively used it for straight thrusts of moral force, Radhakrishnan has

achieved through it a striking lucidity of versatile intellectual exposition, R. K. Narayan has made by its help the novelist's art a rare blend of the simple and the subtle, Sarojini Naidu has been enchantingly lyrical in it, Tagore has given with it to his *Gitanjali* an immortal poignancy, Vivekananda has forged from it a thrilling clarion of the Vedanta calling both the East and the West to God-knowledge, Sri Aurobindo has turned through it philosophy into a magnificent marshalling of spiritual truths and of mystical realisations and poetry into a mighty image of the Eternal, "mountain-lined, crowded with deep prophetic grots."

Mention of Sri Aurobindo spotlights English as undeniably integral to our growth in greatness. For, if a unique spirituality is the core of India, then the fact that our greatest spiritual figure today creates in the medium of English as if English were his mother-tongue is profoundly significant. It sets the seal on the extraordinary capacity of English to transmit by its highly developed plasticity, its multi-suggestive quickness and its packed power the presence of the Infinite that is India's special source of life abounding. This is not to deny the spiritual potentialities of our indigenous tongues. This is only to affirm the important role English is meant to play in our culture. To minimise that role is to fall far short of a truly enlightened revivalism.

A revivalism enlightened and progressive, free from superficial orthodox restraints and insularities, moving out from a richened inward centre is our burning need,

rather than a neutral secularism ignoring the deep foundation which the ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity must seek if they are to become living and spontaneous facts. This revivalism does not imply the entry of terms like *Brahman*, *Atman* and *Ishwara* into our Constitution: it has in that respect no quarrel with the Secular State. But it does imply the resurgence and the furtherance within us of the profound sense India once had of man's origin from the Eternal, his oneness with the Infinite and his destiny of a Life Divine.

## August 15: Its World-Significance

### *Pointers in Modern History*

AUGUST 15, India's Independence Day, has in modern history associations both spectacular and profound. We may say that this date marks the very birth of the power by which international politics was gigantically rocked into the manifold commotion that gave shape to our modern world. For, though it is the French Revolution that brought modern history into being, the forces that exploded in 1789 could never have found a firm organised life if there had not arisen the military colossus we call Napoleon Bonaparte, gathering up the new France into a scourge of God and lashing out at the Europe united to crush her and shattering the entire balance of the old world to the sound of the mighty mantra plucked from the heart of the Revolution—*La Marseillaise*. Through the personality of Napoleon revolutionary France let loose the spirit of modern times—Napoleon who was born on August 15 in 1769.

It is a far cry from this great Corsican to Hitler. But though Hitler cannot compare with him in stature and though he differs also in being an instrument of the dark forces of racialism and totalitarian tyranny rather than a medium, however flawed and self-willed, of liberty,

equality and fraternity, he too precipitated a continent-wide clash of arms and was intensely influenced by the Napoleonic fury. Not only did he start in 1941 his campaign against Russia in the name of Napoleon and on the very day Napoleon had marched against Tsar Alexander I; he also fixed in 1940 the 15th of August as the day on which he would complete his conquest of Western Europe by broadcasting from Buckingham Palace the collapse of Britain. The fall of Britain would have signed the death-warrant of the whole world outside America. August 15 was meant to be the end of World War II, with a decisive victory of the forces intent on putting the clock back and establishing on earth the reign of the *Asura*, the Titan, over the evolving God in humanity. But instead of a resounding triumph, August 15 found Britain still full of fight and on that day the largest toll so far was taken of the Luftwaffe—180 German planes shot down in British skies! We might indeed designate it as the turning-point in the Battle for Britain.

August 15 can also be considered the beginning of peace after World War II, though not the peace Hitler had intended to initiate on that day; for Japan surrendered on August 14, 1945. And, seeing that peace once more was broken by North Korea's invasion of the South and what was in appearance a civil war but really the first violent stroke by Communism in its plan of world-conquest burst on us and America undaunted by terrible disadvantages rushed into the carnage in order to save civilisation, we are led to ask whether again this date has

a meaning. To get the answer we do not have to search long. The hostilities were preluded in early June by a propaganda campaign by the North Korean radio, relayed by Moscow, demanding the unification of Korea on the Communists' terms. The word "peaceful" was thrown about, but the suggestion was everywhere that peace hung on unconditional kowtowing by the Southern Government to the *dictat* of Communism. On June 21 the same radio station spoke further of unification, ostensibly peaceful yet proceeding according to such a plan that within a certain fixed period the goal would inevitably be attained. There was an ominous ring here—and four days later the Communists were on the march across the 38th Parallel. As usual, Communism had talked peace while intending war. But what attaches a peculiarly significant interest to the talk is the time-limit announced for the disappearance of the America-sponsored South Korean regime which, for all its imperfection, was yet democratic in essence. The exact words of the broadcast were: "All measures connected with the peaceful unification of our country shall be completely carried out by August 15 of this year." Yes, once more the day expected to be the beginning of the end of the democratic spirit on earth by armed might was August 15!

### *The Democratic Ideals and Our Independence Day*

Surely a date of momentous implications for the values of civilisation has been chosen by India to celebrate her

independence. Why did she select this particular date? There seems to have been no conscious assessment of whatever import it bore by the year 1947 in which the last British soldier left Indian soil. But behind the conscious thought of individuals there is the working of that invisible yet potent being which is the national soul or genius. Every country has such a soul and every true patriot feels directly or indirectly its presence. In terms of the wide yet demarcated body of land in which one takes birth and grows and dies, in terms of the large mass of people who are bound together by geographical limits, in terms of a long history behind that mass, in terms of a culture subtly single in the midst of all variety of province and language—in diverse terms separate or combined is felt the national soul. And always a personification is made of it, a great presiding spirit is envisaged, a Mother-being that is the true secret life of the country's collectivity as well as physical expanse. No matter how rationalistic we may be, the moment we are patriots the heart in us intuits this Mother-being and with the dream of its more-than-human loveliness and on the supporting breath of its super-animation we move to the exertions and the heroisms that ordinarily lie far beyond our powers. When a country's collectivity is disposed to occult insight the national soul is most clearly grasped by the patriot heart: thus in Ireland and in India we find the intensest response to the superhuman presence constituting the nation. Especially in India with her endless history of

rishi and yogi and bhakta and avatar, patriotism is at its roots a religious fervour, and the most creative of its many forms has been the one with which it started on its career of revolt against British rule—the one which found its most puissant expression in the upsurge of Bengal during the partition of this province by Lord Curzon and which went to its fiery work with that open acknowledgment of the national soul, the worshipping cry of *Bande Mataram*, "I bow to you, O Mother". This cry rang throughout the many decades of the country's toil for freedom and even now when superficial purposes have sought officially to replace Bankim Chandra's inspired anthem, replete with the very essence of Indianness, by the more deliberate more cosmopolitan composition, *Jana Gana Mana*, the outleaping apostrophe to the Goddess that is India has not lost its appeal—still in a myriad bosoms the flame of occult recognition burns—through the officially secular mind itself of those in charge of the government the Mother, though often obstructed, works secretly her will. In the instance of a country like India the outwardly unconscious choice of a date like August 15 for the Independence Day must be traced to no fortuitous concourse of atoms in the brains of her Ministers but to the deep design of her national soul.

How shall we state this design? On the data already mentioned, we should say that India is meant to be the arch-representative of the ideals with which the modern age broke on the world. Liberty, equality, fraternity—

these are intended to be embodied most vividly by India. They have never been materialised in the full sense because either their true order has not quite been understood or else, if it has been understood, the ultimate connotation of them has been elusive. The French Revolution and its Napoleonic consolidation laid the stress on liberty. Indeed this was not unnatural, for it was liberty that was most denied in the days before the taking of the Bastille. The fall of the Bastille, the throwing open of the doors of the State prison symbolised the animating principle of the whole terrific movement which swept away the "divine right" of kings and the shackles of feudalism. That is why up to now the Revolution is celebrated on July 14. But, in the sphere of social life, liberty, though precious and indispensable, does not always make for either equality or fraternity. The only equality and fraternity it automatically goes with are a common status in the eyes of the law—at least in general. For the rest, it may bring in an immense latitude for competition and a chance for the best-placed, the strongest, the most skilful, the least scrupulous to get the upper hand. The remedy sought for this latitude is economic equality, and democracy which is government based on the individual's freedom of action as well as of thought has been opposed by collectivism which is government founded on equal association in labour and a common profit-sharing. Collectivism may not be altogether reprehensible in theory but in practice it becomes a rule by force, an iron levelling-down, a rigid

regimentation: liberty suffers enormously and a dictatorship is created steam-rolling both social and intellectual life. Fraternity suffers too, for where liberty is not guaranteed there is always the Secret Police and no man can trust his neighbour and all live in fear and suspicion. If a choice is to be made between the dangers of democracy and those of collectivism, the former are far preferable since the mind is left free by them and the mind's freedom is a greater progressive force than the artificially secured welfare of the body. Besides, as we observe strikingly in America, such welfare is not impossible to democracy, what is needed is planned economy and not necessarily collectivism. Also, a degree of fraternity can be and often is brought about, for the principle of liberty is not in itself averse to but, if properly developed, consonant with the principle of "live and let live"—tolerance, kindness, mutual respect, diversified harmony. Again, by its allowing the mind of man to go unfettered, it gives *lebensraum* not only to the cult of altruistic humanism and to idealistic art and philosophy but also to the religious, the spiritual, the mystical drive towards realising a single Selfhood of the cosmos or a single Fatherhood of the world and, as a result, a spontaneous compassion that takes all universe into its embrace and establishes a natural link of love, as if the entire creation were one family of brothers. It is because democracy is not exclusive, as a collectivist dictatorship is, of such possibilities of inner and outer growth that the formula of the French Revolution, for

all its shortcomings, is a valuable step in human history and those countries that have erected their political and social order on some form or other of its teachings are the true friends of India and, despite their remnants of colonialism, their fight today against Communist tyranny is her fight as well. Her hitting upon August 15 as her Independence Day is a sign from beyond the outer surface of her life, a pointer from her national soul, that her place is in the vanguard of democracy and that her mission is to fulfil what the democratic peoples of the West are still fumbling after.

*Our Independence and Sri Aurobindo*

The way to fulfilment is by stressing neither liberty nor equality but fraternity. Given genuine fraternity, liberty and equality follow. More than any other country India is equipped for building the democratic order on a fraternal basis. For, above all countries it is she who has lived for the only fraternal basis which can last and carry a superstructure of authentic freedom and justice: God-realisation. And as soon as we speak of God-realisation being India's master quest no less than being the one means of fulfilling the ideals of democracy we come to be on the look-out for a yet profounder reason for our national soul's predilection for August 15. What we expect to find is the identity of this date with some occasion closely linked to not only our own struggle for independence and for the triumph of the democratic

ideals but also the sense of a presiding Goddess with which our nationalism is so powerfully charged and the direct concrete experience of the one yet multiple Divine Reality that has been the lodestar of the Indian consciousness down the centuries. If we could discover the identity we should know with redoubled certitude that the date of our Independence Day was due to no accident nor dictated by mere convenience but decided by the national soul. And by exploring the precise historical circumstances of the identity we should be able to learn where to seek correct guidance for the future and how to rise to the height of our destiny.

There is no traditional festival from the past on this date. With none of our political leaders in the forefront at present is it particularly connected. But on August 15 falls the birthday of Sri Aurobindo. Our Cabinet had not noticed it at all when they fixed the Day of Independence. Though to celebrate it people in their hundreds from all parts of India had been gathering together in Pondicherry for several years before the end of British rule, there was no thought in the minds of our Ministers to give it importance by making the Independence Day coincide with it. This is sad proof of the imbalance of values in contemporary India, the dearth of vision in our leaders. All the more remarkable, therefore, is their striking upon just this date for the happiest and most meaningful political event for us in modern times. And all the more clinching as well as heartening is the evidence that the national soul, the

great Mother with whose dear and majestic name we launched the struggle for freedom, was not slumbering but from the forgotten depths of our being was still pointing a luminous finger. For Sri Aurobindo answers to all the expectations we have enumerated: his life singles him out for association with the coming into its own by a country like India.

It was as a leader of Nationalism that Sri Aurobindo first caught the public eye. Although educated in England and bringing a rich assimilation of all European culture, he stood out as an incarnation of the true Indian genius. In him the culture of this hoary land sprang vibrantly to life and when he plunged into the political arena at the time of Bengal's partition by Lord Curzon and took up the leadership of the fight against foreign rule, he brought something more than patriotic vehemence, something more than democratic idealism. He came burning with the consciousness of India as the mighty Mother—the occult insight into the superhuman being that is the national soul was like a fire in his breast and every word he spoke carried the same incandescence home to his hearers. The old milk-and-water psychology of prayer, protest and petition he transformed almost overnight into the dynamic of a will intoxicated with the vast wine of the national soul's super-vitality. A Presence greater than human individuals was felt by all who followed Sri Aurobindo in those dangerous days. And it was because this Presence was made a reality in the land that the Swaraj movement took on the aspect

of Fate: the Shakti who had sustained Indian culture through millenniums and endowed it with a living continuity from a past beyond that of Egypt or Greece or Rome to a present in which Memphis is but a wonderful memory, Periclean Athens no more than a mass of magnificent ruins and the Rome of the Caesars only the wind-swept and grass-covered Coliseum—the perpetual Shakti tore the veil between the inner and the outer and with her fiat gave the struggle for independence an inevitability of success. Under Her inspiration Sri Aurobindo, in eight effective years, laid down the broad lines of the whole future of Swarajism, lines from which, in spite of all changes of personnel and programme, India never essentially deviated.

Nor is this all that Sri Aurobindo the politician did. Through the quick-shifting drama of his political career—the countless constructive ventures in journalism, the innumerable practical acts of patriotic policy, the agitations, the arrests, the house-searchings, the legal attacks and counter-attacks, the sensational climax in the year-long detention as under-trial prisoner in Alipore Jail and the subsequent court-scenes with Eardley Norton the most brilliant criminal lawyer in India as Crown Prosecutor, Chittaranjan Das shielding Sri Aurobindo by a case for defence worked out through feverish months at the cost of his own health and the loss of a lucrative practice, Mr. Beachcroft sitting in judgment over a man who had been with him at Cambridge and had beaten him there to second place in Greek and Latin—through

all the dramatic vicissitudes of those eight years ran not only the occult insight of genuine patriotism but also the mystical vision of the aspiring Yogi. Sri Aurobindo brought to his work the full reality of the Being hailed by Bankim Chandra in *Bande Mataram*. The national soul felt by historical India is not merely the presiding genius of the human collectivity in the land bounded by the Himalayas and by rivers and seas. The distinguishing mark of the Indian consciousness is the realisation, from age to age, of the Eternal, the Infinite, the Absolute. Essential India is the long procession of seers and saints from Vedic antiquity up to our own day. Hence the national soul, the Mother of these myriad knowers and lovers of God, must be herself a face and form of the Divine and wrapped in the atmosphere of the Supreme Being must she be envisaged and invoked. That was the message of Bankim Chandra's song and of Sri Aurobindo the politician, that was the core of the Aurobindonian Nationalism which made this song the throbbing life-blood of Bengal and, through Bengal, the entire sub-continent.

None, in the political field, before or after Sri Aurobindo can be put on a par with him in fusion of spiritual energy with patriotic fervour. Is it not, therefore, in the fitness of things that the Independence Day of a country whose chief glory has been God-realisation should coincide, in spite of all the predominantly political character of this day, with the occasion of Sri Aurobindo's birth? And would it not be purblind on our part to miss

a signal so pregnant with meaning and fail to see our future bound up with his presence in our midst—our future of true self-growth political as well as cultural and of leadership among the nations on the path of human evolution towards Godhead?

We cannot yet declare that the scales have been shed from our eyes. But increasingly the darkness thins and more and more there are openings and through them the country is yearning to come into contact with the Wisdom and Power round which an Ashram of spiritual aspirants has grown to many-sided creative activity in Pondicherry. Every year the many hundreds who from all quarters of India and even from abroad join the eight hundred residents of the Ashram to celebrate the birth-anniversary of Sri Aurobindo congregate in greater numbers. The name of the Master is on the lips of seekers in Europe and America no less than India and the time is not far off when the whole modern mind will gravitate to the Aurobindonian philosophy of Supermanhood.

### *Sri Aurobindo and the Modern Mind*

All the more eagerly will the gravitation occur because of three factors. Sri Aurobindo brings a philosophy not in the sterile intellectual manner that has been traditional in the West heretofore. His philosophy is not an abstract logic-spinning from a few principles of thought mixed with a few data of ordinary observation. It is only the intellectual elucidation and systematisation of concrete

and direct experience of realities lying beyond the mere mind: it is but a mental picture of what is realised by the inmost consciousness in its Yogic penetration of the subliminal and the supraliminal. Modern man is rather impatient with the old purposes and methods of philosophising: when he wants to go further than physical science he is more a psychologist than a metaphysician, and this turn—enlightened increasingly by research in what is termed extra-sensory perception—is likely to be attracted by a metaphysics based totally on Yoga which is after all a super-psychology seeking to grip fundamental truth by breaking out from our present narrow limits of consciousness and widening forth to be one with the inmost stuff of existence. Of course, there are many obstructions in the modern mind, especially the incubus of nineteenth-century scientific materialism which, though theoretically neutralised by the new physics, could still be in actual life a haunting influence opposed to Yogic philosophy. But the general trend of the present age, as it develops further, will approach such philosophy more and more gratefully.

Parallel to the line towards super-psychology is the drive initiated in the last century by Nietzsche with the formula: "Man is something to be surpassed. Lo, I teach you the Superman!" Nietzsche's idea of the Superman was much coloured by the science of his day and it was at best a titanic heroism aggrandising man's physical nature by means of an iron will laughing at natural obstacles and subduing both the ordinary self and the

common world in order to intensify the life-gusto and fit it for extraordinary exertions. Now that the general climate of thought has changed considerably and we have beheld with startled gaze the Nietzschean dream come almost true in the *Herrenvolk* of Hitler and are facing another version of it in the aggressive challenge of Stalinist totalitarianism, the idea of the Superman cast deep into the modern mind by Nietzsche is showing signs of becoming subtler and purer and less egoistic, more inclined to values like "sublimation" and "integration of personality." In short, it is getting orientated, however slowly and stumblingly, in the direction of the Aurobindonian *weltanschauung*.

The Superman, for Sri Aurobindo, is man surpassing himself by a triple change of consciousness. The human being has to discover his own true soul. Usually we take the life-force to be the genuine psyche or else we discern the mind-energy as master of both life-force and body and label it as soul. Sri Aurobindo says that even what we know as body, life-force and mind are not all that works physically, vitally and mentally as the individual. There are occult realms of physicality, vitality and mentality through which the individual can put himself into contact with universal reality. Our hidden statuses in these realms are more deserving of the name "soul" if by that name we mean nothing beyond the mind-life-body combination. But in fact there is in the profundities of our being a distinct psychic individual, a spark of divinity whose ordinary manifestations in us are

disinterested search for truth, selfless leaping of ethical idealism, pure desire to create beauty and whose clearest expression is the aspiration towards the Eternal, the Deific. This Immortal within the mortal, this inmost Initiate of God-communion whose channels are mind and life-force and body and who passes from birth to birth in an evolving universe has to be realised in full constant experience. The second change of consciousness is the realisation of the single Spirit of all existence, the one Being who has become all things—an infinite Self that is everlasting peace, an infinite Nature that is everlasting power. And this Spirit is to be experienced not only as a cosmic splendour but also as a supra-cosmic trinity of Existence, Consciousness and Delight. The third change of consciousness is what Sri Aurobindo defines as the realisation of the Supermind. The Supermind is the Spirit in its creative poise, the Spirit massing together its inexhaustible reality of oneness and manyness into a harmony of archetypes, as it were, and projecting from that harmony a gradation of world on world and relating itself to these emanations as their Lord and Lover. It is when the Supermind which holds the divine original of the world not only in essence but also in formulation is realised, with the transcendental Existence, Consciousness and Delight as its base, the Universal Self and Nature as its one instrument and the inmost soul as its other medium that man reaches a Supermanhood most dynamic for world-uses.

And because Sri Aurobindo's Yoga puts so much emphasis on such dynamism, modern man in quest of his soul will be drawn the quicker towards the Aurobindonian *weltanschauung*. Whatever we may outgrow of Nietzsche's gospel, whatever Titanism of it we may reject, the note he struck of energy, of the Will to Power is in its root-significance an inalienable part of modernism's this-worldly formula of "Here and Now." In this connection the last of the factors making for gravitation of the modern mind to Sri Aurobindo comes most aptly for comment. The quest for the soul today, *via* the concept of the Superman, is not out of rapport with important elements of the Christian or any other religious ideal of the past, but it is yet a cry for some new perfection. In the first place, that ideal split existence into two irreconcilable or at least disparate orders—the natural and the supernatural—and world-life was seen as only a transition from the one to the other: world-life had no justification in its own rights and the more the supernatural was admitted into it the more was the natural relinquished and effaced. Secondly, man was regarded as a fixed being, a creature set for ever in form and function, with horrible lower reaches and splendid higher ranges between which he could move but beyond which he could never go to an entirely new pattern of world-life. There was, in the old religious ideal, no sense of evolution. With the advent of the evolutionary concept into science the supernatural, if believed in, promises to be deemed no contradiction of the natural but

rather its concealed reality, a perfection to be grown into and flowered forth, a greatness which need not demand the effacement of our present smallness but should organically adapt it. And a possibility is grasped of evolving a new species as much other than man as man is other than the animal, a different and better poise of the whole organic entity with an intenser level of general consciousness. A half-serious half-fantastic play on the notion of this possibility is the neo-vitalism of Bernard Shaw, the development of the Nietzschean *nîsus* into the hopes and dreams of what Shaw has termed Creative Evolution. The evolutionary concept also underlines the value of the outer instrument of the inner vitality: if the natural is not to be effaced by the supernatural and if a new species may be evolved, then surely the external basis and vehicle of the greater and intenser consciousness calls for extreme attention, since without its keeping pace with the inner progress there will be no secure establishment of the fruits of that progress and a decline will sooner or later set in.

All these ideas floating in the mind of modern man are rarely quite definite and are often ineffective or misdirected. But when the light of Sri Aurobindo's Yogic philosophy will fall upon them, they will get definition and quicken to their true objectives. They will reveal themselves as vague approximations to what Sri Aurobindo brings and offers. We might even say that to a considerable extent they are the responses created by the Aurobindonian vision itself—faint echoes of his inspi-

ration in the mental spaces of the contemporary world. On the whole they and this inspiration are both the presence of the Divine Word of the *Zeitgeist*—the former the tenuous peripheral vibration, the latter the dense central note of the mantra of the Godhead ascending from His concealment below in the darkness and descending from His mystery above in Eternity's gold and Infinity's blue. In a luminously positive and comprehensive form, with a flexible yet undeviating technique of integral development, Sri Aurobindo's Yogic philosophy catches up the truth of evolution. His Yoga is not just a soar into the Spirit's sky, with a connecting line kept between that amplitude and the individual existence here until the hour of the body's death. He declares that evolution lacks its total sense if there is not a descent of the higher consciousness together with an ascent of the lower. Those evolutionary terms, mind and life-force and matter—what is their fulfilment if the Divine Being from whom they have emanated carries only a sojourning soul through them and never grants them through that soul a deific destiny of their own—a mind not fumbling for knowledge but seizing it with a lightning flash, a life-force not enslaved by petty desire and incapable of coping with the challenge of circumstance but large and blissful and sovereign in its steps, a body not subject to disease and age and accident but full of radiant health, possessed of automatic immunity? This question has never been answered in the past. Perhaps it was never even precisely put. But there has been a dream of some *elixir*

*vitae*, a cry for the kingdom of heaven on earth, a vision of the perfect human form pre-existing as a *kārana sharira* or causal body in the empyrean of the Supreme Consciousness. What has not been there is the intuition that if all has come from the Divine into an evolutionary universe all must have an inevitable divine consummation and that in the Supermind, where the original truths and archetypes glow for ever, dwell both the plan and the power of transforming integrally the whole being and nature of man. In world-work the Supermind is Sri Aurobindo's speciality: possessing it in full, bringing it down for embodiment, organising its multi-creative energy on earth, he has laboured at the beginnings of a completely new pattern of world-life, a new species with no more the mind in charge, no more the mind permeating what is below it, but with the Supermind as the head and front and converting into its own terms of truth-consciousness the entire rhythm of man's existence. The *kārana sharira*, the causal body whose stuff is God's infallible and incorruptible light, is sought to be made one with the *sukshma sharira*, the subtle body of our psychological activity, and finally with the *sthula sharira*, the gross body that is our physical life. This oneness is the authentic next step of evolution fulfilling the urge towards perfection which is the distinguishing sign of man who is "something to be surpassed", the urge so long broken up by his ignorance into conflicting ideals, so long foiled of earthly satisfaction and therefore diverted to losing its visionary acuteness in some ineffable Beyond.

By the oneness here and now of the three instrumental formulations of the Spirit Sri Aurobindo promises a different earth inhabited by a growing number of men made both inwardly and outwardly perfect and effecting ever-novel discoveries of the infinite Divine in art, philosophy, science, politics, society-structure and industry.

When the procession of disciples and pilgrims offers garlands to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother on August 15, it is to the vision and power of supramental creation at work amidst us that the offering is done and in that gesture lies the seed of man's birth into integral Godhead. Hence the birthday of Sri Aurobindo is the supreme festival of progressive humanity, the portent which the *Asura* dreads most and would strive most to nullify. It gives to the occasion of India's celebration of her Independence and to the strange occurrence of this date at more than one critical juncture of modern history their ultimate world-significance.

## Sri Aurobindo and the Korean War

Dear Khwaja Ahmed Abbas,

I am commenting on your "Open Letter to Sri Aurobindo" in *Blitz* of August 26,\* because I feel that in your attitude there is at bottom the sincere puzzlement of one who in his own way has admired Sri Aurobindo and cannot now reconcile with what he considers Sri Aurobindo's greatness the statement got by P.T.I. from the Seer of Pondicherry on the Korean war. You are surprised that so ardent a fighter in his own youth against British imperialism in India, so profound a thinker with a world-view based on a philosophy of integrating the spiritual with the material life and the demands of society with the claims of the individual, so detached and serene and contemplative a mind could declare the war in Korea to be Communism's first move in its plan of world-conquest, stress the necessity of America's taking drastic preventive action from the very outset, even at the risk of a world war, and ask Truman to turn thus the tables on Stalin so that the latter who is not yet ready for a showdown on a global scale might be forced to yield position after position to him instead of *vice versa*.

Let me make a brief attempt to relieve your genuine pain and to show your resultant indignation to be mis-

guided. But, first of all, let me point out that the world-saving Word which Tagore felt Sri Aurobindo possesses has not at all been, as you imagine, denied by Sri Aurobindo to the waiting world. Quite a series of books has been published under his name; the most recent are *The Life Divine* (946 pages), *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *The Human Cycle*, and *The Ideal of Human Unity*. Three volumes of his Letters on all conceivable subjects from Sachchidananda and Supermind and Krishna's Consciousness to Bernard Shaw and Indo-English Poetry and the Value of Physical Education are on the book-stalls. The Aurobindonian Word is there for all to hear and I do wish you would take the trouble to glance through at least *The Human Cycle* and *The Ideal of Human Unity*, which deal with the issues of man's socio-political development and discuss all the fundamental problems of today. Believe me, there is nothing ivory-towerish about Sri Aurobindo, and his so-called retirement from the world is not an escape, however sublime, but a detachment from the common superficial modes of seeing and judging, a concentrated effort to establish for an all-round regenerative work in the world a new consciousness and a new life.

### *Fighter for Freedom and for Humanity's Progress*

Your idea that Sri Aurobindo has made hardly any pronouncement on contemporary situations in India is also incorrect. No doubt he does not issue statement after statement: he speaks only when he feels that an inner

call is on him to do so. But in the last few years there have been a few occasions when he has clearly given tongue to his vision. During World War II he published a message to Cripps and urged India to accept Cripps's Proposals as a working basis for at the same time a united fight against Fascism and our own united freedom from British rule. On a back-look, it appears that if Congress had accepted Cripps a new mind would have been created in this country and the post-war partition and its consequent horrors would have been avoided. Indeed, Sri Aurobindo had declared that terrible things would happen if we let surface considerations side-track us from seeing the need of the moment and the fruitful potentialities of what Cripps had proposed. Later, when India became independent, Sri Aurobindo had a fairly long message broadcast, in which he reviewed the whole situation, national and international, at that time and made a pronouncement about partition which is still worth remembering: "The partition of the country must go,—it is to be hoped by a slackening of tension, by a progressive understanding of the need of peace and concord, by the constant necessity of common and concerted action, even of a instrument of union for that purpose. In this way unity may come about under whatever form—the exact form may have a pragmatic but not fundamental importance. But by whatever means, the division must and will go. For without it the destiny of India might be seriously impaired and even frustrated." He also said: "Asia has arisen and large parts of it have been liberated

or are at this moment being liberated; its other still subject parts are moving through whatever struggles towards freedom. Only a little has to be done and that will be done today or tomorrow. There India has her part to play and has begun to play it with an energy and ability which already indicate the measure of her possibilities and the place she can take in the council of the nations."

Surely these are the utterances of a mind wide-awake and surely there is no absence here of the fighter for freedom whose voice once filled the whole arena of Indian politics. Nobody who has carefully studied Sri Aurobindo's writings or messages can charge him with any sympathy with Western imperialism or colonialism. And such a charge is quite unthinkable in the light even of his remark, in the same broadcast, about the occurrence of India's Independence Day on his own day of birth: "As a mystic, I take this identification, not as a coincidence or fortuitous accident, but as a sanction and seal of the Divine Power which guides my steps on the work with which I began life. Indeed, almost all the world movements which I hoped to see fulfilled in my lifetime, though at that time they looked like impossible dreams, I can observe on this day either approaching fruition or initiated and on the way to their achievement."

The least we have to grant Sri Aurobindo is that, just as the "retirement" of a dynamic personality like him can never be escapism, so too whatever judgments he may permit to be published cannot be motived by anything except a high spiritual vision and a profound passion for

humanity's progress. How could you forget this and bring yourself to write apropos of his message on Korea: "Pardon my saying so, but this is not the voice of a saint, not the voice of an oracle of God, not the voice of a seeker of divine Peace. This is not the voice of Buddha, not the voice of Christ, not the voice of Gandhi. This is not even the voice of Aurobindo. It is the voice of the State Department in Washington, it is the voice of Wall Street, it is the voice of Churchill and of the most rabid warmongers of Europe and America."

I wish you had not stooped to this level of suspicion and calumny. The tone of impeachment and the "Beware!" that comes into it on the heels of these unfortunate words are really unworthy of you who, in the first part of your letter, have proved yourself perfectly cognisant of Sri Aurobindo's glorious career and extraordinary eminence as both man and thinker. Perhaps even this sensationalist accusation is not quite divorced from your genuine puzzlement, and only the journalist in you with his eye to rhetorical effect has tripped you into it. I believe that the cause of your puzzlement and indignation is not any anti-Aurobindonian animosity or Communist partizanship but an obsession with the West's past history of imperialism and colonialism, an insufficient appreciation of the facts of Russia's imperialist ambition which cannot even stand a fellow-Communist but non-Stalinist country like Yugoslavia, an ignorance of the basis of Sri Aurobindo's condemnation of the Communist ideology and practice and his support to the Western democracies despite all

their shortcomings which he is very well aware of and which he has no desire to condone. The best way of opening your eyes is perhaps to quote bits from a letter written by Sri Aurobindo to a disciple at the commencement of the last war and widely publicised at the time.

### *Spirituality and War*

About the war unleashed by Hitler, he said: "It is not a fight between nations and governments but between two forces, the Divine and the Asuric....What we have to see is on which side men and nations put themselves; if they put themselves on the right side they at once make themselves instruments of the Divine purpose in spite of all defects, errors, wrong movements and actions which are common to human nature and all human collectivities. The victory of one side (the Allies, America, Britain, France) would keep the path open to the evolutionary forces; the victory of the other side would drag back humanity, degrade it horribly and might lead even, at the worst, to its eventual failure as a race, as others in the past evolution failed and perished....What we say is not that the Allies have not done wrong things, but that they stand on the side of the evolutionary forces. I have not said that at random, but on what to me are clear grounds of fact. What you speak of is the dark side. All nations and governments have been that in their dealings with each other,—at least all who had the strength and got the chance. I hope you are not expecting me to believe that

there are or have been virtuous governments and unselfish and sinless peoples. But there is the other side also. You are condemning the Allies on grounds that people in the past would have stared at, on the basis of modern ideals of international conduct; looked at like that all have black records. But who created these ideals or did most to create them (liberty, democracy, equality, international justice and the rest)? Well, America, France, England—the present Allied nations. They have all been imperialistic and still bear the burden of their past, but they have also deliberately spread these ideals and spread too the institutions which try to embody them. Whatever the relative worth of these things—they have been a stage, even if a still imperfect stage, of the forward evolution. England has helped certain nations to be free without seeking any personal gain; she has also conceded independence to Egypt and Eire after a struggle, to Iraq without a struggle. She has been moving away steadily, if slowly, from imperialism towards co-operation; the British Commonwealth of England and the Dominions is something unique and unprecedented, a beginning of new things in that direction; she is moving in idea towards a world-union of some kind in which aggression is to be made impossible; her new generation has no longer the old firm belief in mission and empire; she has offered India Dominion independence or even sheer isolated independence, if she wants that,—after the war, with an agreed free constitution to be chosen by Indians themselves.

"All this is what I call evolution in the right direction however slow and imperfect and hesitating it may be. As for America, she has foresworn her past imperialistic policies in regard to Central and South America, she has conceded independence to Cuba and the Philippines. Is there a similar trend on the side of the Axis? One has to look at things on all sides, to see them steadily and whole. Once again it is the forces working behind that I have to look at. I don't want to go blind among surface details. The future has to be safeguarded; only then the present troubles and contradictions have a chance to be solved and eliminated.

"The Divine takes men as they are and uses men as His instruments even if they are not flawless in virtue, angelic, holy and pure. If they are of good will, if, to use the Biblical phrase, they are on the Lord's side, that is enough for the work to be done. Even if I knew that the Allies would misuse their victory or bungle the peace or partially spoil the opportunities open to the human world by that victory, I would still put my force behind them. At any rate things could not be one-hundredth part as bad as they would be under Hitler. The ways of the Lord would still be open—to keep them open is what matters. Let us stick to the real, the central fact, the need to remove the peril of black servitude and revived barbarism threatening India and the world, and leave for a later time all side-issues and minor issues or hypothetical problems that would cloud the one all-important tragic issue before us."

It is with a vision and attitude similar to this, and not because of any political bias in America's favour or any prejudice against Soviet Russia's atheism, that Sri Aurobindo puts himself on the side of Truman against Stalin. He is not squeamish on the point of war. All depends on the nature of the war waged. Of course, he would do all to prevent war, especially a world conflict—but not by appeasing the aggressor and not at the cost of values without which peace would be worthless. Whether, in such a view, he has Buddha or Christ or Gandhi behind him is irrelevant. None of them undertook the work that is Sri Aurobindo's. You have yourself said that he is not an ordinary Yogi and if you study his writings you will realise that, great as spirituality in the past has been, it has not done what Sri Aurobindo wants or it has perhaps not even attempted the Aurobindonian kind of radical and integral transformation of the world. Ultimately most prophets were for the Beyond while Sri Aurobindo strives to bring the Beyond down to earth-concreteness and make God manifest here and now in a new humanity and a new earth. World-affairs are closely connected with his Yoga and his ideal. Whether he makes public pronouncements or no, he does not stand aside from the march of the ages as, in a fundamental sense, past spirituality with its asceticism and other-worldliness has done in varying degrees, for all the dynamism it may have shown in certain matters. You are mistaken in saying that the statement on Korea is not the voice even of Sri Aurobindo. It is the same voice that spoke during World

War II. And whether it differs or not from Buddha's or Christ's or Gandhi's voice, I know that it is the voice of Sri Rama who did not hesitate to wage a long and bloody war on Ravana and it is the voice of Sri Krishna who, when his efforts for peace had failed, urged Arjuna to fight on the field of Kurukshetra even though the Pandavas to whose ranks he belonged were not all saints.

### *Stalinism, Democracy and the Aurobindonian Future*

You may, of course, argue that Stalin is not proved to have had anything directly to do with North Korea's attack or that sufficient evidence is not there to demonstrate his ambition to conquer and enslave the world's mind as well as body. But I don't think any non-Communist student of international affairs doubts in his heart that Stalinist Communism is the greatest danger today to civilisation, an all the greater danger than Nazism because a subtle strategy is employed to subvert civilised values by appealing to man's enthusiasm for equality and justice. But what equality and justice in the true sense can there be if the mind of man which is his real manhood is put in chains and all thought steam-rollered into conformity with the Communist Party line and there is not a vestige of political liberty? A Khwaja Ahmed Abbas can castigate the Indian Government or run down the capitalists in what he considers to be a heavy-handed State bolstered up by capitalism, or the editor of *Blitz* can dub Congress raj Fascist and

at the same time criticise without fear the Prime Minister himself and call his policy on Korea a betrayal of the cause of freedom. Such things are possible in all the non-Communist democracies. But they are impossible in Stalin's Russia. And equally impossible would be the work there of a Buddha or Christ or even Gandhi, who would have preached in season and out against Dialectical Materialism and the Economic View of History, if not also against giving high-sounding names to the totalitarian tyranny of a small disciplined minority which in Russia substitutes the power of the unorganised capitalists in the countries where the Communist denial of individual freedom does not reign. Much more would the mission of a Sri Aurobindo be baulked of its luminous fulfilment if no force were pitted against the sweep of Communism over Korea and the battle for Light were lost in the very first round by a non-interventionist and dilettante policy by the Americans who took action as soon as the U.N. found North Korea the aggressor and as soon as North Korea refused to withdraw. If Sri Aurobindo—with a vision cleared of egoism and partiality, purified and enlightened by long practice of Yoga—sees here again a conflict essentially between the Divine and the Asuric, it is to his credit that he has boldly spoken out and lifted his voice against the tendency too often found amongst us to let past rancours sway us and to be mazed in superficialities when judging flare-ups like Korea and when weighing the Western democracies against the Russian bloc. You have told Sri Aurobindo that though his

disciples may shut out inconvenient visitors like your "Open Letter" from reaching him, History will knock at his door one day. You hardly know the disposition of Sri Aurobindo or of his disciples. The intellect is not a prisoner in Sri Aurobindo's world and your letter will reach him, but the answer to it he has already given in a score of books. As regards History, it is Sri Aurobindo himself who is knocking at its door with his ideal of an integrated humanity embodying a Consciousness more than human by means of his dynamic Yoga to bring about for earth

*What most she needs, what most exceeds her scope,  
A Mind unvisited by illusion's gleams.  
A Will expressive of soul's deity,  
A Strength not forced to stumble by its speed,  
A Joy that drags not sorrow for its shade.*

Yours sincerely,  
K. D. SETHNA.

## The Passing of Sri Aurobindo: Its Inner Significance and Consequence

### I

“No one can write about my life because it is not on the surface for men to see”—this is what Sri Aurobindo said when the idea of a definitive biography was mooted. There is no doubt that, except perhaps for his brilliant academic career in England and the early phases of his fiery political period in India, his life was too deeply inward for its utmost sense and motive and achievement to be unravelled by a narration of external events supplemented by a psychological commentary. To arrive at some vision of it one would have to catch an inkling of not only the vast mysteries of traditional spiritual realisation but also the dazzling immensities of the new earth-transforming light which he called the Supermind and which he endeavoured for forty years to bring down *in toto* for suffering humanity. As with his life, so too with the phenomenon which the world has reported to be his death. Sri Aurobindo “dying” cannot but be as inward, as profound as Sri Aurobindo living.

No Yogi dies in the ordinary meaning of the word: his consciousness always exceeds the formula of the physical body, he is beyond and greater than his material

sheath even while he inhabits it, and his action on mankind is essentially through his free and ample spirit to which both life and death are small masks of a fully aware immortality in the limitless being of the Divine and the Eternal. All the more inapplicable is the term "death" to the passing of a Master of Yoga like Sri Aurobindo. For, it is well known that the transformative power of the Supermind was at work in the very cells of his body and that it commanded an efficacy physical no less than psychological, to which hundreds of his disciples can testify because of the wonderful curative impact of it on their own ailments. This efficacy was not confined to his Ashram: telegraphic offices all over India will bear witness to the daily flashing of appeals for help in various illnesses, including those that often defeat medical science, and then messages of thanksgiving for relief and remedy by spiritual means. No, Sri Aurobindo, the Yogi of the Supermind descending into the outer as well as the inner being and bringing a divine life on earth in addition to the infinite immortality of the Beyond, cannot be looked upon as passing away on account of old age and physical causes. Whatever the purely clinical picture, it must have behind it a significance integral with his highly significant and immeasurably more-than-physical life of spiritual attainment.

That there should be a clinical picture instead of a miraculous vanishing trick is exactly in keeping with Sri Aurobindo's Yoga. His Yoga was meant to be a process and a progression of the evolutionary method: it

aimed not at a bewildering superimposition of divine qualities which still left the grain of human nature unchanged, but at a spiritually organic luminous growth, an assimilation by nature of supernature, a marvellous and yet no freakish transfiguration, an intense working out within a life-time of what is not foreign to the purpose of terrestrial evolution but its inmost meaning whose unfoldment is in the very logic of things, though that unfoldment may ordinarily take aeons. The evolutionary was always fused with the revolutionary in Sri Aurobindo's Yoga of the Supermind and, just as his life's audacities, like those of his art of poetry and prose, were always felicitous, full of ease and aptness, gloriously adapting nature rather than violating it, so too the adventure of his death would be no utter supernormality but carry for all its profound import and exceptional mode some semblance of the common passage to the stillness and the shadow.

What medical science would try to describe as physical causes are, therefore, far indeed from being any contradiction of the thesis that Sri Aurobindo did not pass away as a result of them. And this thesis, we may now add, is based not only on Sri Aurobindo's special spiritual status but also on a number of remarkable physical facts. Doctors have declared, on the strength of typical non-response to stimuli, that he entered into deep coma in consequence of an extreme uraemic condition following upon a failure of all treatment. As every medical tyro knows, such a state of uraemic coma admits of no return to conscious-

ness. Yet to the surprise of the doctors attending on him, Sri Aurobindo opened his eyes at frequent intervals and asked for a drink or inquired what the time was! This repeated occurrence of the scientifically impossible leads one to believe that the deep uraemic coma was intermixed, as it were, with a very conscious Yogic self-withdrawal from an instrument which was too damaged to be kept for common use but which yet could not quite bar the uncommon will of its master. Here was no brain of mere carbon and iron and phosphorus: here was the subtilised servitor of a mind that had sat on the peaks of God and from there could command response in the midst of all material determinism. Even half an hour before the breathing ceased and the heart stopped beating, Sri Aurobindo looked out from his calm compassionate eyes, spoke the name of the doctor by his side and drank some water. This was the strangest uraemic coma in medical history.

Nor did the extraordinary character of the passing of this Yogi of Yogis end there. In a case certified to be one of complete pervasion of the system by the accumulation in the blood of body poisons which should be thrown off by the kidneys, the system gets discoloured in a short time, a blackening grows apace and then decomposition sets in. But when there was a consultation of doctors, both French and Indian, two and a half days after the death-certificate had been signed, Sri Aurobindo's body was found to have retained the beautiful white-gold colour that had distinguished it during his life and there

was not the slightest trace of decomposition. It was just as it had been at the moment of his passing—1.26 a. m. on December 5—and also just as it had been 41 hours later when instead of the scheduled burial the famous announcement was made by the Mother, indefinitely postponing it: "The funeral of Sri Aurobindo has not taken place today. His body is charged with such a concentration of supramental light that there is no sign of decomposition and the body will be kept lying on his bed so long as it remains intact." It lay intact for several days in a grandeur of victorious quiet, with thousands upon thousands having *darshan* of it. Only at 5 p.m. on December 9, in a rosewood case lined with silver and satin, it was buried most simply and without any sectarian religious ceremony in a vault specially prepared in the centre of the Ashram courtyard. Even when the body was put into the case, there was neither actual decay nor the odour of death, though marks were present to indicate that the miraculous preservative light had begun to depart. The light may be said to have remained in full for over 90 hours—a period more than double the record time which Lyons' *Medical Jurisprudence* gives of a body keeping undecayed in the climatic conditions of the East.

When during the transition to life's close and even after, in the very thick of death, a challenging lordship is manifested over Matter and the transformative power of the Supermind that was ever increasingly Sri Aurobindo's is not denied but paradoxically proved, it is—to say the least—reasonable to see the whole event of his passing as

the culmination of a momentous deliberate fight whose implications can be read only by understanding a little the supramental light. But here the question arises: If the fight was deliberate, did he give any signs of its coming? The answer is: Yes. It is indeed true that, though the great illuminating letters to his disciples had not quite ceased nor the fine humour forgotten altogether its leap and flash nor yet the wide look on the world's movement turned away, he had been for the last couple of years rather reticent about his plans for the future and more and more absorbed in his own inner spiritual work and in literary creation, especially his epic poem *Savitri: a Legend and a Symbol*. But through the reticence and the absorption a few hints did glimmer out of a strange and dire possibility he might have to confront in the course of his mission.

Some time in November the predictions of a Gujarati astrologer were read out to him. Their focal points were the years 1950 and 1964. The astrologer wrote: "In 1950, as the sun and the moon are in conjunction and the moon is the master of the twelfth house, there is a chance of Sri Aurobindo's self-undoing." About 1964 he opined: "In that year some mighty miracle of Sri Aurobindo's power will be witnessed. Aged 93, he will withdraw from the world at his own will after completing his mission." On hearing this, Sri Aurobindo raised his hand and half-jocularly said: "Oh, ninety-three!" as if he had found that age too far away for his mission's achievement. With regard to 1950 a disciple remarked that it must be a year

of importance, since important things had happened in Sri Aurobindo's life at intervals of 12 years. 1926 was an outstanding landmark in Sri Aurobindo's spiritual career: it is called the year of assurance of victory and marks practically the beginning of the Ashram with the Mother radiantly presiding over it. In 1938—12 years after that landmark—Sri Aurobindo passed through a physical crisis by falling and fracturing his right thigh-bone. 1950—with its indication of a possibility of "self-undoing"—makes again a 12 years' lapse. And, though the astrologer took only his forecast of a memorable ninety-third year in Sri Aurobindo's life very seriously, Sri Aurobindo seemed to regard his statements as not quite fantastic. He said: "The man has got hold of some truth." Then he was asked: "Isn't the prediction about your 'self-undoing' this year nonsensical? Surely, you are not going to leave us?" In his grand unhurrying way came the calm counter-query of just one mysterious word: "Why?"

A most surprising word, this, to all who had expected that an unusual longevity as a result of the Supermind's increasing descent was part of Sri Aurobindo's programme. Another surprise was fraught with a strange foreboding joy. To those who looked after him or worked in his room he gave a sign of sudden personal tenderness. Sri Aurobindo was not exactly a demonstrative nature: he had the subtle kindness as of an all-enveloping ether and though his extreme compassion is evident both in the labour he undertook and in many letters written to his disciple in difficulty, physical expressions of his great

paternal attitude were rare. But now for a brief moment there went out to his attendants—to each in a different way and on a different occasion—a distinct outward gesture of affection, as if he had wished them to know before it might be too late his appreciation of their service. The gesture, exceedingly sweet and welcome though it was, appeared to hold vaguely in it the poignancy of a possible leave-taking.

A third surprise may be recorded: a remark which fell oddly on the ear of the disciple whose job it was to take down whatever Sri Aurobindo dictated by way of letter or book. The Master had been busy with his *Savitri* for several years, revising the text he had composed earlier and constantly adding to it, amplifying the significances, enriching the story, extending the symbolism, catching more and more intensely the vision of the superhuman planes of existence and consciousness to which he had access, breathing with an ever-truer thrill the vast rhythms of the movements of the Gods with which he had grown familiar. Out of some unfathomable silence he would draw out golden phrase and apocalyptic line—wait as if he had eternities to throw away—proceed with splendid bursts of occult imagery and revealing description—hark back to expand or amend, with an eye to the tiniest detail of punctuation or sequence, and again press forward with a comprehensive yet meticulous inspiration. A lordly, a leisurely labour was *Savitri*, conceived with something of the antique temperament which rejoiced in massive structures—especially the temperament of the makers of the

*Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* which take all human life and human thought in their spacious scope and blend the workings of the hidden worlds of Gods and Titans and Demons with the activities of earth. A kind of cosmic sweep was Sri Aurobindo's and he wanted his poem to be a many-sided multi-coloured carving out, in word-music, of the gigantic secrets of the supramental Yoga. More than twenty-five thousand lines were thought necessary to house the unique vision and the unparalleled experience. A patience as vast as that vision and that experience characterised always Sri Aurobindo's dealings with this epic. Even the version on which he was engaged was the eleventh or the twelfth. Time without end appeared to be at his disposal when he sat dictating lines like those about the central figure of the poem:

*As in a mystic and dynamic dance  
 A priestess of immaculate ecstasies  
 Inspired and ruled from Truth's revealing vault  
 Moves in some prophet cavern of the Gods,  
 A heart of silence in the hands of joy  
 Inhabited with rich creative beats  
 A body like a parable of dawn  
 That seemed a niche for veiled divinity  
 Or golden temple door to things beyond.*

But all of a sudden a couple of months before the fateful December 5 Sri Aurobindo startled his scribe by saying: "I must finish *Savitri* soon."

Of course, all this does not fix the very date of his passing nor does it show any desire to depart, but, clearly, the grim struggle in which he got involved and which came to a close on that date had loomed already as a likelihood in the near future. And a certain fact about *Savitri* fits in here with the aptest symbolism. Though he strove to finish his epic soon, it just fell short of completion. It had been projected in twelve Books, with an epilogue, but while even the epilogue got written—at least as a general first draft—and the Book of Beginnings, the Book of the Traveller of the Worlds, the Book of the Divine Mother, the Book of Birth and Quest, the Book of Life, the Book of Love, the Book of Fate and several other Books are available for enthusiasts of spiritual poetry, the one single Book which does not exist in any form at all—except for a short piece written a long time ago and meant to be revised and included in a much larger whole—is the Book of Death. Most suggestive is this fact, as if that Book could not be composed until the Grim Spectre had been grappled with in actuality and as if Sri Aurobindo had been waiting for some mighty crisis of his own bodily existence before he could launch on this part of his *Legend and Symbol*.

Everything goes to prove that what happened in the small hours of that December day was no purely physical casualty, no fell accident to the seeker of the life divine on earth, but a dreadful gamble freely accepted, an awesome trial undergone for a set purpose, a battle faced in

every wounding detail with open eyes and joined with the explicit possibility threatening him of losing in it the most gifted and glorious bodily instrument forged by the manifesting Spirit that is for ever. But the question still stands to be answered: What could be the reason of the perilous experiment? It is doubtful whether any answer expressible by the mere mind can be entirely satisfying. Perhaps none ought to be attempted and we might rest with the conviction that Sri Aurobindo of his own will did what he deemed most necessary for the advancement of his work and we might leave it to the Mother—Sri Aurobindo's partner in that work—to unroll the supreme rationale of the Master's will in the actual developments of the Integral Yoga in the future. However, the Master himself never completely discouraged the effort of the mind to comprehend the Spirit's manifold action. Intellectual formulation of direct inner knowledge or else of intuitive seizures of the Unknown was a thing he fostered, and if by some rapport with his own luminous philosophy we could arrive at a mental glimmer of the Aurobindonian Supermind's intention we should be doing what he himself from beyond our gross senses would perhaps not refuse to sanction.

## II

THE core of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy and Yoga is the dynamic Truth-consciousness that is the Supermind. By "Truth-consciousness" is meant that status and force

of the Divine which brings out of the Divine's absolute Transcendence into a perfect manifestation of Self-being and Self-becoming the potentialities of the play of the One who is at the same time the Many. This manifestation is a complete harmony in which exist and function the creative truths, the flawless originals, the golden archetypes of all that is in our imperfect cosmos in which the Divine has posited a difficult evolution of matter, life-force and mind—with a soul supporting them—out of a vast Inconscience, a primal darkness set by Him as the nether pole to the transcendent Absolute. Between the two poles and above the evolving earth and below the archetypal Supermind are various occult planes—Subtle Matter, Vitality, Mind, Overmind and, at the back of the first trio, Psyche,—with their beings and movements and there is a complex interaction in the whole system of cosmos on cosmos. All this was known in general to the ancient seers and they saw in man who is the microcosm a threefold reality concretised into what they termed three sheaths or *shariras*—the gross outer, the subtle inner, the causal higher. The last is the substance of the Supermind, compacted of its creative light of total knowledge, infinite power, immortal bliss. But the ancients did not realise that the earthly evolution is not meant only to release the being into the Cosmic Self and into ever more deep, ever more high poises of consciousness and into some eternity beyond birth and death but also to bring into earth-terms the dynamic modes of the widths, the depths and the heights and ultimately the supreme

perfection of the Truth-plane—the *kārana sharira*, the causal body—so that earth-terms themselves may be fulfilled and not merely serve as bright points of departure into the wide and the deep and the high. In short, the ancients lacked a full and organised possession of the Supermind's purpose and power: the fusion of the supramental light with the inmost soul and the descent of it into mind and life-energy and even the physical body, transforming and divinising them in entirety, are Sri Aurobindo's special discovery and Yoga. With the supramental descent Sri Aurobindo aimed at creating a new humanity enjoying true self-consummation and living divinely in every field, and it is with this aim that he sought to form an initiating double centre for the new humanity by his own supramentalisation and the Mother's.

Supramentalisation involves, among its final elements, freedom from disease, duration of life at will and a change in the functionings of the body—all, of course, as a material expression of the divine nature emerging in the human and not as an outer aggrandisement of an expanding inner egoism. But to compass these final elements which alone would be found with utter security a supramental earth-existence the Yogi has to tackle at last the bed-rock of the Inconscience, the dark basis of the submerged Divine from which evolution seems to issue. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, taking upon themselves as representative pioneers the agelong difficulties of all human nature, have been striking against this bed-rock for the last decade and a half. "No, it is not with the Empyrean that I am

busy," wrote Sri Aurobindo in 1936 to a disciple and added: "I wish it were. It is rather with the opposite end of things; it is in the Abyss that I have to plunge to build a bridge between the two. But that too is necessary for my work and one has to face it." In the course of this plunge, as layer after layer of the occult Inconscient is torn open and the supramental light sought to be called down into it, various dreadful possibilities rise up and great inner wounds as well as severe bodily tensions have to be endured. But throughout the fight the Master of the Supermind carries the talisman, as it were, that can ward off the fatal blow. Immense, in spite of the sublimest light within his very body, are his trials and yet he has also the capacity to emerge finally the victor and blaze a path of ultimate triumph for the men who follow him. Thus to emerge had been Sri Aurobindo's plan, so far as the plan can be read through his philosophical writings and his personal letters. Both the plan and the non-egoistic world-wide attitude of an Avatar find voice in a letter of 1935: "I am not doing anything for myself, as I have no personal need of anything, neither of salvation (*Moksha*) nor supramentalisation. If I am seeking after supramentalisation it is because it is a thing that has to be done for the earth-consciousness and if it is not done in myself, it cannot be done in others."

Yes, Sri Aurobindo, in his published pronouncements, appears to have envisaged the need and therefore the prospect of himself constituting together with the Mother the starting-point of supramental humanity. But in the

same pronouncements he leaves also a small margin for a different *dénouement*. A letter of 1934 speaks in general about the ways of a vessel of God: "The Divinity acts according to the consciousness of the Truth above and the *Lila* below and It acts according to the need of the *Lila*, not according to men's ideas of what It should do or should not do." A clearer hint of unexpected turns in the Divine's dealings is contained in a letter of 1935: "Why should the Divine be tied down to succeed in all his operations? What if failure suits him better and serves better the ultimate purpose? What rigid primitive notions are these about the Divine!" This suggests that apparent defeat of the Divine's grandest goal could even be a concealed victory, a way precisely to reach that goal with greater swiftness by means of a paradoxical strategy. And, all conditions considered, it is truly such a strategy that seems to have been employed by Sri Aurobindo when to the superficial gaze he succumbed to a renal disorder.

The whole supramental Yoga was indeed like a great general's campaign against forces that had never been combated before by any spiritual figure. In the teeth of every common experience, every posture of human living down the ages, even every articulate spiritual tradition, this Yoga hoped to change the very foundations of Matter and proceeded into an embattled darkness: only a fearless fighter like Sri Aurobindo, only a genius like him of the Spirit militant could have intuited the mighty secret of the epiphany in evolution and planned the transformative onslaught on established nature and moved ahead in the

frame of mind that is disclosed in yet another letter of 1935: "It is not for personal greatness that I am seeking to bring down the Supermind. I care nothing for greatness or littleness in the human sense.... If human reason regards me as a fool for trying to do what Krishna did not try, I do not in the least care. There is no question of X or Y or anybody else in that. It is a question between the Divine and myself—whether it is the Divine Will or not, whether I am sent to bring that down or open the way to its descent or at least make it more possible or not. Let all men jeer at me if they will or all Hell fall upon me if it will for my presumption—I go on till I conquer or perish. This is the spirit in which I seek the Supermind, no hunting for greatness for myself or others." A splendid heroism of selflessness is here, the vividest picture of a warrior Yogi who would take any risk, if thereby he could press closer to his objective—and though the formula is "I conquer or perish" the frame of mind is one that might easily avail itself of a yet more audacious formula: "I perish to conquer." To embrace this formula what would be required is simply the sense that, by sacrificing in a final grapple with the black powers of the Inconscient a wonderful body tinged with supramental light, those powers would be terribly exhausted and the golden godhead above tremendously pulled towards earth and into this body's partner in the Yoga of the Supermind. As soon as the momentous sense would dawn, Sri Aurobindo would be ready—supreme general that he was—to alter his

entire scheme of battle, relinquish his whole line of previously prepared forts, abandon the old method of advance, change suddenly his well-plotted direction and, instead of attempting to supramentalise his physical existence in every detail, move imperturbably towards some titanic ambush, cast away the very guard given him by the Supermind and go down fighting to win all in secret, while losing all on the surface.

Nothing except a colossal strategic sacrifice of this kind in order that the physical transformation of the Mother may be immeasurably hastened and rendered absolutely secure and, through it, a divine life on earth for humanity may get rooted and be set aflower—nothing less can explain the passing of Sri Aurobindo. There would also be implied in the holocaust a world-saving action by the sweet power of which Sri Aurobindo speaks in a letter as far back as 1934: "It is only divine Love which can bear the burden I have to bear, that all have to bear who have sacrificed everything else to the one aim of uplifting earth out of its darkness to the Divine." We may say that some undreamt-of calamity would have afflicted the world if the vast poison had not been drawn away into the body of this one man whose spiritual consciousness, armed with divine Love, had made him a universalised individual incarnating the Transcendent's Will. And here we may refer again to the fact that the obstacles confronting Sri Aurobindo in his Yoga were not really personal. They were representative of the race and he gladly accepted their retarding

perilous load in spite of or perhaps because of his own exceptional gifts and abilities. Apropos a query about some temporary complaint in the Mother's body many years ago, he wrote: "we have not sought perfection for our own separate sake, but as part of a general change—creating a possibility of perfection for others. That could not have been done without our accepting and facing the difficulties of the realisation and the transformation and overcoming them for ourselves. It has been done to a sufficient degree on the other planes—but not yet on the most material part of the physical plane. Till it is done, the fight there continues....The Mother's difficulties are not her own; she bears the difficulties of others and those that are inherent in the general action and work for the transformation. If it had been otherwise, it would be a very different matter." Obviously, then, whatever sacrifice is made by Sri Aurobindo or the Mother cannot be one imposed on them by personal defects. Theirs the unique *adhars* or vehicles of Yoga which could, if left to themselves, surmount every obstacle. This, in the present context of Sri Aurobindo's departure, means that death is not anything he was obliged to undergo on account of some lack in himself. It is some stupendous crisis of the evolving earth-consciousness—some rebellious clouding upsurge of the divinely attacked Inconscient—that has been diverted to his own life, concentrated in the mortal risk of the uraemic coma and utilised by the master strategist for an occult advantage to the work he had assumed—the

work which was always more important than direct personal consummation.

But it would be of the essence of the sacrifice and the strategy, as well as typically Aurobindonian, that a keenly struggling resistance should be there together with the large and tranquil acceptance. That is why we have said that Sri Aurobindo has gone down fighting. Never to acquiesce in any shortcoming of earth-nature was his motto, for he saw the very secret of evolution to be the manifestation in earth-nature of what superficially looks impossible—the quivering forth of vitality and sensation in seemingly lifeless Matter, the glimmering out of mind and reason in apparently instinctive animality, the all-perfecting revelation of Supermind in ostensibly groping intelligence, stumbling life-force and mortal body. So there never could be for Sri Aurobindo either a surrender to ordinary world-conditions or a flight into peace away from the world. An inviolable timeless peace he had always known ever since those three grand days in Baroda in 1908 when through a complete silencing of the mind the absolute experience of Nirvana, which has been the terminus of so many other Yogas, became his—not as a terminus but only as a base for further conquests. As for surrender, he could surrender to nothing except the Divine. Consequently, he battled for the Supermind's descent till his last breath—calling the immortal Sun of the Spirit down, passionately packing his earthly envelope with the supramental light so much so indeed that he could keep for several days that envelope

free from the taint of discolouration and decay. To battle thus in the very moments of the sacrifice was in tune with his whole life-endeavour. Has he not himself expounded in a letter the technique of triumph in the midst of seeming downfall? "Even if I foresee an adverse result I must work for the one that I consider should be; for it keeps alive the force, the principle of Truth which I serve and gives it a possibility to triumph hereafter so that it becomes part of the working of the future favourable fate even if the fate of the hour is adverse."

With these far-seeing phrases of the Master we may close our attempt to elucidate a little the mystery of that look of magnificent meditation with which he lay from early morning of December 5 for more than 111 hours in his simple bed in the room where he had spent over two decades of intense world-work. "Spiritually imperial"—this is the only description fitting the appearance of his body: the heroic countenance with its white beard and its flowing white hair above the massive forehead, its closed quiet eyes and its wide-nostrilled aquiline nose and its firm lips whose corners were touched with beatitude, the broad and smooth shoulders, the arms flexed to place on the indomitable chest hand over gentle artistic yet capable hand, the strong manly waist covered by an ample cloth of gold-bordered silk, even the legs stretched out with an innate kingship reminiscent of their having trod through seventy-nine years with holy feet at once blessing and possessing earth. The atmosphere of the room was vibrant with a sacred power

to cleanse and illumine, a power which appeared to emanate from the Master's poise of conquering rest and to invade the bodies of all the watchers with almost a hammering intensity from over their heads as if, in redoubled force because of Sri Aurobindo's selfless physical withdrawal, there came pouring down to humanity the life-transfiguring grace of the Supermind.

And we may add that somehow the personal presence itself of Sri Aurobindo grew intenser. He who had so long kept to a room for the sake of concentratedly hastening the Yogic process of transformation the wonderful bliss and dynamis of which the Mother had been canalising by her physical nearness to the disciples—he by setting aside his most exterior sheath broke out into a new intimacy with his followers and took them even more directly into his immense being. But it would hardly do justice to that being if we thought of it as merely a pervading greatness. Behind the material envelope are other organised vehicles—subtle and causal—and Sri Aurobindo had brought the remote causal effectively into the proximate subtle and was pressing it into the outer sheath at the time of his strategic sacrifice. To quote again his words, "The transformation has been done to a sufficient degree on the other planes." This means that he held the Supermind embodied in his subtle *sharira* and that he was under no occult necessity, no law of subtle Nature, to give up the latter for the purpose of returning to some plane of the soul's rest before being reborn with a new subtle body as well as a new gross one.

Sri Aurobindo, at the hour of his physical withdrawal, was in a position to do much more than be the cosmic and transcendent Purusha that his supramental Yoga had made his incarnate personality. He could actually be that Purusha active in an indissoluble subtle body at once divine and human, in a far more direct constant touch with the material world than could the forms which mystics have visioned of past Rishis and Prophets and Avatars. In a most special sense, therefore, Sri Aurobindo the marvellously gifted and gracious person who was our Guru and whom we loved is still at work and a concrete truth is expressed by the Mother when she says: "To grieve is an insult to Sri Aurobindo, who is here with us conscious and alive." The same concrete truth is engrossed in the beautiful message of December 7, which she delivered out of her depths where she and Sri Aurobindo are one: "Lord, this morning Thou hast given me the assurance that Thou wouldst stay with us until Thy work is achieved, not only as a consciousness which guides and illumines but also as a dynamic Presence in action. In unmistakable terms Thou hast promised that all of Thyself would remain here and not leave the earth-atmosphere until earth is transformed. Grant that we may be worthy of this marvellous Presence and that henceforth everything in us be concentrated on the one Will to be more and more perfectly consecrated to the fulfilment of Thy Sublime Work."

So the work goes on, the Mother fronting the future, with the Master by her side in subtle embodiment. And

for those who have faith in the work's fulfilment and who understand what that would be, there is a hope that sees the future pregnant with a particular most heart-soothing possibility. Sri Aurobindo has written in connection with the time when the Supermind's descent into flesh and blood will be complete: "In the theory of the occultists and in the gradation of the ranges and planes of our being which Yoga-knowledge outlines for us there is not only a subtle physical force but a subtle physical Matter intervening between life and gross Matter and to create in this subtle physical substance and precipitate the forms thus made into our grosser materiality is feasible. It should be possible and it is believed to be possible for an object formed in this subtle physical substance to make a transit from its subtlety into the state of gross Matter directly by the intervention of an occult force and process whether with or even without the assistance or intervention of some gross material procedure. A soul wishing to enter into a body or form for itself a body and take part in a divine life upon earth might be assisted to do so or even provided with such a form by this method of direct transmutation without passing through birth by the sex process or undergoing any degradation or any of the heavy limitations in the growth and development of its mind and material body inevitable to our present way of existence. It might then assume at once the structure and greater powers and functionings of the truly divine material body which must one day emerge in a progressive evolution to a

totally transformed existence both of life and form in a divinised earth-nature."

These words hold out the prospect that Sri Aurobindo who has already a divinised subtle physical sheath may employ the supramental mode of manifestation for the purpose of presiding in the domain of Matter itself over the new humanity which the Mother will initiate. In that dawn of God's gold the Mother will be the first being to achieve the divine body by a progression through a body born in the natural manner, while through the support of her achievement Sri Aurobindo may be the first being to put on the physical vesture of transformation by a projection of substance and shape from supernature. Nothing, of course, is certain about what Sri Aurobindo may will to do, but the possibility we have figured is not out of accord with all that we have glimpsed of a quenchless and victorious light beyond the human in the very event which strikes the surface eye of the aspiring world as a universal sunset—the passing of Sri Aurobindo.

## Miracle

THE Indian mind and the European have many points in common, but there is also a marked difference. The difference can perhaps be best brought to light by referring to the word "miracle." The non-Indian world is always prone to be startled by supernatural events: the mouth gapes, the eyes bulge out and the hands shoot up. The unexpected has happened! The impossible has taken place! The Unknown has drawn aside its veil! In short, a miracle has occurred. The true Indian world has no such surprises. Magic and mystery are part and parcel of its life; the supernatural is not a sudden incursion from "nowhere" but just a visit from the other parts of the same building which we ourselves occupy. The mouth does not gape; it whispers greetings. The eyes do not bulge out; they give a look of recognition. The hands do not shoot up; they join in a quiet *namaskar*. In short, no miracle has occurred but just what one would expect since everything is Brahman. "That old man with a stick; that green bird hopping about—these too are Brahman," says the Upanishad. What is there to be surprised at if the old man suddenly threw away his stick and strode like a youngster or the green bird brought a message from Vishnu?

The presence of the so-called supernatural became so familiar, so immediate, so basic indeed that at a certain period of India's history the natural began to seem a

miracle, an inexplicable wonder. How did the eternal One become the Many of Time? This question worried the Indian mind. And the answer was: Maya. The unexpected and the impossible are the teeming universe. Matter and not Spirit is the startling fact. This world of ours is a sudden incursion from "nowhere", its myriad maze a puzzling imposition on the smooth simplicity of the Beyond. An undivine miracle was seen instead of a divine one.

This extreme is a perversion, but it serves to emphasise India's sense of the naturalness of the Eternal. Not even in the most religious eras, the most religious countries, of Europe has that naturalness been felt so universally. Individuals have known it. "When the sun rises, do you not see a round disk of fire, something like a guinea?" said a practical-minded friend to Blake. And the poet replied: "Oh no, I see an immeasurable company of the heavenly host crying, 'Holy, Holy, Holy' to the Lord God Almighty." Here there is no line between Nature and Supernature. St. Francis, calling the sun his brother and the moon his sister and all things one family of God, catches a spark of the Gita's *Vasudeva sarvam*, "All is the Divine." Many sentences of the German mystic Eckhart and some discourses of Lady Julian of Norwich are strangely reminiscent of the talks between master and disciple in the Upanishads. Individuals in Europe, therefore, can be said to have the Indian spirit. But the general mind tends to be different. Europe has much to give us; and there are plenty of indispensable values

that have got submerged in India and have to return *via* the West. What it lacks on the whole is what is most native to us—the sense of continuity between man and God, between the world and the All-Wonderful.

This sense is born of India's intense pantheism. Not that India is pantheistic and nothing else. Indeed it is impossible to stop with the pantheistic vision. For, in that vision everything is equally the substance of God: all the distinctions we draw between true and false, high and low, beautiful and ugly, happy and miserable, vanish and nothing is left save a shining tissue of the infinite Spirit. Glorious is such a vision, but even to reach it one has to pick and choose among the dualities, one has to reject lust and greed and attachment, one has to practise purity and peace. In other words, to attain the essentially distinctionless Divine, one has to distinguish between values. The dividing line between the spiritual and the unspiritual brings in a God who at the same time is the universe and other than the universe, a transcendental Being who validates distinctions, supports the evolutionary movement and takes sides in the perilous drama of life without essentially ceasing to be both sides! Yes, without ceasing to be pantheos: this is important, this is what the non-Indian mind often forgets and what the Indian always remembers. By its remembrance, the Indian mind gets steeped in God's presence and not only feels most vividly the possibility of getting divinised but entertains the largest charity towards even that which it rejects and endeavours to outgrow.

## **The Spiritual Life and World-Problems: Two Letters to a Seeker**

### **I**

I BELIEVE you have sincerity of search. It seems to me that what you have to do is to let this sincerity take as much effect as possible by bringing up the true Godward strain in you which at present appears to be a little mixed up with the ethico-social urge. Not that the two need be at loggerheads; but the former should subsume the latter and not *vice versa*.

I come now to the specific points you have raised. A person who is frustrated and unhappy can make others happy by doing his best to keep his frustration and unhappiness in the background and by being good and considerate and helpful. It can also be that if one is loved by somebody, one automatically gives happiness of a kind, even though one is frustrated and unhappy. But frustration and unhappiness are serious impediments and they can often distort one's attitude and spoil one's conduct. What is required is some sort of "sublimation" if one's desire to serve people and make them happy is to prove fruitful. And there can be no greater sublimation than the turning of one's frustrated and unhappy self towards the Divine and away from the feverish attachments to

ordinary things which has brought about that unfulfilled and miserable state of mind. When such a turning is done, that state of mind is not a drag but an occasion for the calling down of a supreme light and bliss. Filled with this light and bliss one is the natural radiating centre of a constant happiness which does not even need to speak or do things but invades and envelops other people's consciousness, so that the very presence is sufficient to make broken spirits whole. And this radiated happiness does not merely make people comfortable in their own little holes of all-too-human imperfection: it lifts them up, kindles in them a sense of the ideal and the perfect, draws out the secret soul of them and helps them to find in themselves the strength and the peace which no circumstance can defeat or destroy. Authentic and truly evolutive happiness, therefore, can only be given by those who have caught something of the Divine's delight and fullness.

What you call "self-knowledge" and consider "the beginning of wisdom" is precisely the awakening of one's real soul whose spontaneous movement is always to be in communion with the Divine and be charged with the Divine's Truth, Rightness, Beatitude and Wideness. The more this movement develops, the more self-knowledge comes and wisdom grows. The development has, normally, to depend on two powers. One is the direct power of the soul itself—the intense aspiration, the passionate devotion, the unconditional surrender to the Divine. The other is an indirect power—the clearing of the way for the soul by the mind's will towards an inner

detachment from things and persons, a large equanimity and disinterestedness, a freedom from anger and rancour, a tranquil strength, a calm generosity, an untroubled accomplishment of all work, a remembrance of the Divine Presence everywhere and a quiet yet concentrated offering of all one's work into Its hands. I may add that some time may be reserved for what is called meditation —the getting alone, the cutting off of contacts, the turning inward, the stilling of thought, the one-pointed flowing of the consciousness towards the Supreme.

Your question about the prevalence of so much suffering in the world would require a long philosophical discussion for a complete answer. But, for practical purposes, it is enough to know that we ordinarily live in a consciousness which is not in union with the perfect Being of God but is limited and divided: suffering is the badge of all limited and divided living. And, as long as this limitation and division lasts, it is not possible also for people to abstain from hurting one another or bring to one another understanding and love. I don't mean that people cannot be or are not good at all. But there is always an uncertainty in their intentions and actions: whatever effort they may make, there is an easy slipping back into selfishness and cruelty. Conflict is the second badge of a living that is limited and divided. To get rid of the two baleful badges we have to change our poise of consciousness. Such a change cannot be compassed by merely will-power attempting to follow certain mind-made rules of ethics. The ethical endeavour has considerable value, but it cannot

eradicate the evil from the roots. Our present mental-vital-physical status lacks the light and the force by which alone suffering and conflict can be avoided. We have to explore our deeper ranges of being, bring into the forefront the inner self, the true soul, call down into the mind and the life-energy and the body the Divine Consciousness by a direct process of Yoga. By Yoga I don't imply a sitting in a fixed posture or breath-exercises or any special ascetic regime. Yoga is simply the leap of the consciousness towards the Eternal, the Infinite, the Divine in order to achieve a union with that Perfection, a union both in rest and activity. When one has this union one knows and becomes the single Spirit that is all things and more than all things in the universe. And don't you see that if the same supreme Self is experienced to be in all beings the very ground of conflict disappears and a wonderful harmony takes its place?

As for social work, I think there can be no real social work unless one proceeds from the living sense of the single supreme Self in all beings. Then alone one's action will be pure and powerful. Mind you, I say "real social work". Short of this there are various degrees of social service of a good kind; but always the limited and divided consciousness that is man will bring in its greeds and egoistic motives and competitions and lust for fame and for position. The authentic idealist if you will always be disappointed, for ordinary social work is a very mixed affair and even at its best it does not escape the taint, however subtle and refined, of the limited and divided

ego. Well, I suppose you have to accept certain conditions. But if you are in the field of social work, what you have to do is to work there in the spirit of a Yogi and inwardly dedicate all your work to God by a constant remembrance and offering. For, whether you do one kind of work or another, you as a Yogi serve not any persons or institutions or merely human causes but only the Divine and have to manifest His will and His light and His joy. Also, there should be no attachment to one kind of work in preference to another. You may certainly choose what you are inclined towards or what you think you are best fitted for; but you should have the capacity to give it up without uneasiness and disturbance if ever the call comes to do so. And I can assure you that if you live in constant touch with your true soul you will have such a fund of causeless and unconditional happiness within you that no changing of work or any other vicissitude can upset you or make you feel that you have lost something.

Now your last query. Of course it is possible to do Sri Aurobindo's Yoga even outside his Ashram. But at some time or other it is always advisable to go for a stay, short or long, in the Ashram in order to have the Mother's direct contact and get into the luminous atmosphere of the life there. However, a genuine contact with the Mother is quite possible while staying in Bombay. And the best way of doing Yoga is to have this contact. Think of her and feel her to be your Guru. Inwardly open your heart to her. Keep remembering her always and dedicate

your actions to her. Aspire to have her guiding word within yourself. And now and again write to her, freely and frankly, as if you were her child both in soul and body. Fellow-aspirants can give you whatever advice they may be capable of and their advice can be of help. But the Mother alone can be your Guru and in important crucial matters her advice and guidance are essential.

## II

You have asked: How is one to know that one's search for the Divine is a true quest? I am not sure what exactly you mean. Are you doubting that to search for the Divine is a quest worth making and not merely a pursuit of a will-o'-the-wisp? Or are you wondering whether what you are searching for is the Divine or is something else? I think it is the latter sense you have in mind. If so, my reply in brief is: "Whenever one feels that the things of ordinary life do not satisfy one and that even the best of fortunes commonly imaginable will not answer the need in one's heart, one has known the call and the touch of the Divine. Whether the call and the touch are a temporary phenomenon—an incident in an interval between two phases of ordinary human life—or a permanent event remoulding one's whole being and shaping one's whole future: this depends on the intensity of the inner flame. The intensity may not always show on the surface in its full drive, but a certain inner certitude is its sign for the outer self. When

you say, 'I definitely know that I am searching for something, but what I do not know,' you seem to me to give a hint of the certitude I speak of. But you must try to get some sort of silence in the being so that matters may become quite clear and the call and the touch of the Divine may reveal themselves in an unmistakable shape. Don't doubt your destiny, but ask it inwardly to show its true light."

Your next question is about the exceeding care needed about one's company and environment when one is wanting the Divine. The injunction you quote does not mean that you should seclude yourself from common contacts, but it would be wise to refrain at present from the contact of those who are opposed to your quest for the Divine or are very gross in their nature. A lot of influences come to us on the level of the subconscious: we may hardly know what has happened and yet a host of things can take place because all of us are constantly interchanging currents on the sub-mental level where there are not sharp demarcations of individuals but a general amorphous mass flowing through all and passing from one to another. In spite of our best aloofness in mind and heart the interchange can take place: that is why we have to be somewhat careful about our contacts. Of course the invasion can come even from afar, but it is less likely and not so strong, provided one is on vigil within and turned towards the Divine.

Your query about humanity and Yoga brings again the theme of "social work." I should say that humanity

is certainly meant to receive the boon of Yoga but our principal and central aim is not merely service of humanity. As soon as you make that service your chief concern you will be attacked by all sorts of doubts about doing Yoga: you will feel that instead of doing Yoga you must absorb yourself in social work, give money to charities etc., etc. You will not want to spare any moment for direct communion with God—and quite naturally because that would take away the attention you should give every moment to humanity. But if, while accepting humanity as God's creation and therefore meant to receive His boon, you realise that the basic need in the world is more and more of God's direct presence, His superhuman consciousness and power and bliss, and that God is greater than humanity and is therefore our primary concern, then Yoga will be a spontaneous movement and the channelling of its influence to humanity will also be an automatic action and you will be helping to remove the world's evil and suffering from the very foundation. Work in the midst of humanity and ostensibly for humanity need not always cease, but during the work the Yogic consciousness will go on and the work itself will be really done as an offering to the Divine and not either for oneself or for humanity which is after all a repetition of oneself on a huge scale.

Your final question is the shortest but actually a tremendous "stumper." All the books written by all the sages won't be a sufficient answer to it. And yet, I suppose, a few general words could hold the heart of the

matter. Let me first repeat your question: "Why do we come into this world and whither are we going?" I'll begin with the words: "this world." What is the nature of this world? It seems to start in brute matter without consciousness. It develops the quiverings of life. It attains the level of mind. It keeps straining beyond the mental. It is a world of evolution in which the initial stage is an apparent negation of the Divine. The open affirmation of the Divine is therefore its evolutionary aim. But such affirmation cannot stop with the soul's inner realisation of God. The outer nature must also become Godlike—and this becoming Godlike is not tantamount only to the outer nature obeying the soul and receiving something of its light. Mind, Life Force, Matter are themselves the Divine concealed, and the soul is just the centre and guide of a world which is not ultimately a contradiction of its divine spark but a veiled perfection which it has to clear of encumbrances and help to unveil. A divine Mind, a divine Life Force, even a divine Matter have to be realised and established. Then alone the aim of evolution will be fulfilled. The complete and integral divinisation of our whole being is the "why" of our coming into this world. If that is so, there is no "whither" in an essential sense. Here and here only must we attain perfection. Of course, the soul passes out of earth at death, moves through subtle worlds and then waits in its own deep world until the time comes to shape forth a new embodiment of new mind and vitality—this happens again and again till a large range of experience

has been collected by the soul in its own depths and the hour strikes for it to turn the whole being into divine values and terms. The Yogic call is a sign that the hour has struck or is very near. Another "whither" is the higher and inner worlds which have to be explored and possessed by the Yogi: he goes into the profundities of being and scales the peaks above the mind, but after experiencing and realising them he must strive to bring their wonders into the outer being. So my answer to the query—"Whither are we going"—is: "We are going everywhere but in order to come back to Mother Earth and transform her and fulfil the purpose for which we came."

## **The Spiritual Life and World-Renunciation: A Letter to One Attracted by the Cloister**

I READ your letter with great interest and my mind went back to my own early days of groping and struggling. When the hunger for the Divine first awoke in me, it was something devastating no less than uplifting. The devastating part of it was to a considerable extent unavoidable, because so much of my ordinary movement of consciousness was contrary to the Godward urge of the inmost soul. I turned with disgust from my way of life, and I yearned to sit alone on some Himalayan height and lose myself in *samadhi*. Not only was common living a matter of repugnance, but even the common mental self-awareness that is ours was a continual pain. I wanted annihilation of my normal being, a submergence of my small self in the Infinite, a forgetfulness of the world and an oblivion of my own existence.

Somehow, things of beauty which to a man of my temperament had a special appeal were to me a special pang. They brought an excruciating exquisiteness or a shattering splendour, and in my intense response to them and enjoyment of them I felt that they at the same time opened a window upon eternity and held me back from that sweetness and glory by their own limited alluring perfection. Always there was the cry in me to transcend

everything and be lost in some sort of formless and nameless, spaceless and timeless tranquillity.

I was very young—not even twenty-four. The conflict, therefore, between what is called the flesh and what is termed the Spirit was acute. That is often how the mystical turn starts. But that is not the essence of mysticism. The conflict is due to the difficulty our true soul finds in coming to the surface through the thick crust of our ignorance and our attachments. As I have said before, the devastating conflict cannot altogether be avoided; but, when the soul succeeds in coming up, the terrible tension goes. The soul is spontaneous communion with the Divine. It does not talk of renunciation, because to renounce implies that one is attached to ordinary things and the soul has no attachment to them. The soul does not think in terms of sacrifice, because to give up hankering after superficial objects it has to make no effort at all—it is most naturally free from the hankering. And when we grow aware of its blissful inherent freedom, we too lose the fear we have of the flesh, the recoil we have from the world. To the soul the earth is not a devil's trap. No doubt, a lot of ugliness is about us, but that is because the earth has not been made the soul's luminously built abode. The earth too is God's own creation and all the power and diversity, colour and complexity that are Nature are secretly God's and are in existence not in order to be hated and dreaded and shunned and escaped from but in order to be converted into channels and instruments and moulds of God. As the Upanishad puts

it: "The Eternal is before us and the Eternal is behind us and to the south and to the north of us and above and below and extended everywhere. All this magnificent universe is nothing but the Eternal." To seek the transcendent Godhead and forget the cosmic divinity—to suppose that the cosmos is a fruitless nullity and has no purpose—is to fly against God's own being and God's own will. There are those superb words of Allah in the Koran: "Dost thou think I have made this whole world in a jest?" Surely the long march of time has some aim and if the soul has come into the world and passes from birth to birth, it is not for kicking off everything and leaving unfulfilled the poor dust out of which we are made.

An utter inner detachment from all objects of desire must be there—progressively, of course, and not attained at one shot. But when we are in love with God alone we have to take heed of God calling out to us from every corner and every particle of His creation. This, mind you, is not just a gospel of doing one's duty and being good to people. Duty and goodness are not negligible, but the spiritual life does not stop with them or even basically consist of them. It consists essentially in increasing union with the Divine and increasing expression of the Divine as a result of that union. In whatever we do we must seek to serve God. If you give a dying man some water and save his life, you do a fine thing, but it is not in itself a spiritual act unless you remember intensely that you are offering the saving cup to the Divine

within the man. A conscious self-consecration, a conscious self-offering are requisite, for then alone all activity becomes a means of uniting with God, participating in God's sinless nature and doing God's perfect will. Of course, until we get the full illumination, we have to go by our own lights, but while doing the best we can we have to keep asking for the higher guidance and we have to think not of duty towards anyone or service to a human being but only of serving the Supreme Lord and Lover, the Supreme Shakti and Mother of the worlds, seated in all things and beings and exceeding them and drawing them to an ever greater perfection. "Remember and offer"—this is the essence of spiritual work.

To come back to my point: spirituality does not imply a spurning of the earth and its calls. To flee from them is the exact opposite pole of the error of remaining enmeshed in them, and has the same partiality, the same incompleteness, the same lopsided extremism. If a choice has to be made between only these extremes, the flight is definitely preferable—it is an absorption in light and not an engrossment in darkness. But this does not change the fact that God's manifestation has been refused by us and that we have spat on God just because He has taken the form of common clay. The monastic or cloistered life, the hermit's ascetic seclusion, are far greater than rotting in the sty of Epicurus, but they do not solve the problem posed by God. They intensely bypass the entire riddle of the universe.

And once we accept the principle of bypassing it, the

most logical thing is not to retire merely into the cloister where at least we have the company of other human beings and a roof above our heads and some common comforts, however meagre. The most logical thing is to cut ourselves off from everyone, deny ourselves everything—live in a dismal cave, wear next to nothing, face the inclemencies of the weather, create hardships where there is the least creeping in of creature comfort, sleep on stones and sharp ones at that, practise terrible austerities, mortify the flesh till it bleeds and faints, reduce life to bare subsistence, grow old as quickly as possible in order to avoid the slightest chance of self-love or vanity, invite diseases in order to make the flesh loathsome, pray for early death in order that the world may be no more. Perhaps even suicide would not be out of place. If life is to be renounced, why not go the whole hog?

Besides, all these methods of being spiritual are artificial and they are signs that somehow the inner detachment is not complete. If one is not attached to earthly things, the feverish urge to throw them away cannot come. They trouble us no longer and do not seem to us hell's own handiwork. Of course, a certain discipline is necessary, but its use is made only for acquiring an inner detachment and not as an end in itself. Merely the reduction of our life to the hard and bare minimum does not lead to spiritual freedom from the grip of things. Do you know the story of King Janaka? He was the lord of a huge empire, he had possessions in plenty and wore beautiful clothes and had hundreds who did his bidding.

But he had been initiated by a rishi into God-knowledge and he sought ever to do God's will. The wealth he had, the power he commanded, the people who served him—all these became the tremendous means of an activity in tune with the highest consciousness. If what he possessed had been given up into the hands of somebody who was not an initiate, it would have been utilised for purposes dark and devious. In King Janaka's hands it became not a denial but an affirmation of God's presence. And mark now what happened when a sannyasi who had left home and belongings and kept only a loin-cloth came to Janaka. The King invited him to his bathing pool and they were both splashing about in the water when a cry arose from the house that a fire had broken out. In a few seconds the King's great palace was all in flames and his finest tapestries and treasures were being licked up by the fire's relentless tongue. Down to the very edge of the bathing pool the conflagration spread. Janaka swam on, undisturbed. But the sannyasi gave a heart-rending shout and rushed from the water, with the words: "Oh my loin-cloth! It will get burnt!"

Inner freedom has nothing essentially to do with poverty or hardship. Self-indulgence is certainly an obstacle and a certain amount of *tapasya* and self-control is necessary, but to go to God by the way of extreme austerity is to maim oneself and to miss that paramount liberty of the Spirit which is attached to neither plenty nor poverty, neither ease nor hardship, but remains the same through all conditions and circumstances and gladly accepts life's

abundance as it accepts life's rigours. When this sort of inner freedom is there, the spiritual life grows at the end a conquest of the world's powers for the sake of the Divine. Art is encouraged and transfigured. Beauty plays in every heart-beat and every movement. And if beauty demands a certain fine organisation of externals, that organisation is accepted. This does not put a premium on what the Mother, of Sri Aurobindo's Ashram, calls in her talks the physical consciousness. One must get out of this narrow superficial mode of being and as long as one has not got out of it one cannot give up a degree of outer discipline, but even here the important thing is, as the Mother says, not to keep oneself *attached* to one's physical needs and enjoyments. One must get rid of attachment to good clothes, good food, comfort and happy social relationships, and to an extent the riddance is helped by discipline, by doing away with many matters which one cherishes. But an impoverishment is not asked for and in any case the inner attachment is what is to be broken. The sign of this breaking is not so much the outer living without conveniences as the inner independence of them which feels no loss at all if they are lacking. To live a particularly hard life, as if any virtue resided in such a life itself, is not necessary to spiritual growth. The error of many a religion is to make too much of austerity and sorrow. This casts a shadow upon the forces of nature in oneself and makes one miss the goal of God in the world. God does not come on the cheap: that is true, and yet it is also true

that God is infinite bliss and endless creativity and life abounding. The goal of evolution is not the martyr's crown of thorns but the wreath of the conqueror. However, I may add that the wreath is never deserved unless one is not afraid of martyrdom and it has to be put on one's brows by only the Guru's hands.

Yes, the Guru is an important part of the higher life. Without the Guru one is likely to go astray in the sense that one may ultimately feed one's ego by subtle means and end up in spiritual pride. One may also come to grief, for when one strives to rise beyond the routine of human existence one gets into touch with strange beings and forces and unless one has a deep purity and sincerity they may make use of one in ways that are far from spiritual and they may even derange one's mind. That is why, I may remark, a matter of prime moment is the development of some kind of peace. The Guru can give this peace as well as a protection by his own power. Unless one is a spiritual genius, one cannot do without the Guru.

Here I may dwell a little on the life of the cloister which you seem to regard as very desirable. Apart from the unnatural tax it lays on one by its rigid rules and its grinding tasks, there is the very great possibility of its not spiritualising one at all. Who is usually in charge of a nunnery? Not a St. Teresa or a St. Catherine, but an ordinary Mother Superior who has an ability to govern and organise, but no special spiritual radiancy. How is she to help one's soul? Of course one may turn to the occult Christ and worship him and call down his help.

But how much is one's own capacity for doing this? Most of us are very ordinary people even when we turn Godward, we are not spiritual geniuses. We cannot for long keep up worship or mystical communion or even the inner strength that laughs at the outer hardships one has often to go through. Deep disappointment is bound to invade us and a bitter resentment against life. One's sister nuns may, and usually do, have many petty traits, for they too are not supernormal folk. A religious bent of mind or an impetuous turn towards the cloister does not transmute people into superhuman beings. And unless a St. Teresa or a St. Catherine is there to guide a nun and help her and uplift her by their very presence and make all her travails and tribulations as worth while as they can be made, the aspirant will not attain her genuine goal—God-union and God-expression. The point is that we must find the Guru who is God-realised; and in a merely moral and pious life which is all that there is in organised religion at its best, whether Christian or Hindu or any other, we have not much hope of being truly illuminated. To sit at the feet of a living Saint or Yogi who embodies the Divine and is with us as a constant spiritual presence in very flesh and blood is the only right and reliable and fruitful way of mysticism.

Lastly, in regard to a person who has passed beyond our own level of consciousness and whose life has not lacked in trials and heroisms, we must remember the opening para of the Mother's talks to which I have already referred, where she says that we must never sit

in crude judgment on what we imagine to be shortcomings. The Divine, when It manifests for earth-work, seems often to act very ordinarily, but we do not know what is the magnificent meaning of Its action. To take an instance from another sphere, suppose an average matric student reads a poem and says, "It's beautiful." What would be the meaning of this statement? Will it put the stamp of merit on the poem? Now suppose a man like Coleridge or Matthew Arnold makes the same remark, "It's beautiful." The words will have come from an entirely different source: they will have sprung from a mind quick to the revelatory impact of poetic inspiration and the significance they will carry for whoever is able to recognise their source will be momentous. The two utterances were identical and yet worlds apart. In a like manner, a spiritual person may act in several respects like a non-spiritual one, but the whole fount of consciousness, the whole aim and objective are altogether different.

People used to question why Sri Aurobindo was staying in one room and not coming out and lecturing or guiding political conferences at Delhi or doing social service. They passed judgment on him for not acting as they imagined a spiritual person should have. The conclusion they drew was that Sri Aurobindo was wasting his time and that his spirituality was dubious. But how could we dictate to a person who had been for years at the job of spirituality, how could we tell what spirituality consists in? Can you dictate to a poet what he should do in poetry?

He may not be good at cooking or at mending clothes, but he knows something about poetry and he should not be compelled to act according to the wishes of those who are not so experienced in the art of writing poems. Similarly, how could we know what Sri Aurobindo, with the aim he had in view, should have done or not done? He knew his job best. We could, of course, have offered suggestions to him, but if he persisted in his own line of living, we should have to concede to him that he knew better than we the art and science of being spiritual and doing the Divine's work. The Mother too knows her work best and is better aware than we of the right way to embody and express the spiritual realisation and to lead others to it. Of course, doubts and questions are not unnatural, but in our search for the Spirit we must not erect our ordinary conceptions into absolute canons. Especially when a new path of spirituality is trod, which, for all its discipline and detachment, tries to take into its sweep the whole essential life-movement of the world and bring about its transformation by the power of what Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have called the Supermind, a power that has never before been completely compassed or directly manifested, such criticisms from a standpoint based on old identifications of spirituality with a stress on poverty and bareness and external abstentions are all the more invalid.

I quite understand that even if you grasp with your mind my contention, some sub-mental impulse may still trouble you. But if the mind grasps a truth, the chances are that this impulse may weaken gradually. The final

blow to it, however, can come only by actual living contact with the Mother and with the truth, the radiancy, the beauty, the bliss, the love, the compassion that she embodies. In front of her, if the soul in you is open even a little bit, your whole being will be flooded with light and everything she does will strike you as the rightest possible and even the things one may most criticise from an outsider's conventional standpoint will become part and parcel of the divinity that is in her smile—for here is

*The Light whose smile kindles the universe.*

## The Mystical and the Misty: An Answer to Some Queries about Sri Aurobindo

A READER from abroad has asked for a clarification of certain points apropos of an article in *Mother India* of July 14, 1951. He writes:

“I read in Prithvi Singh’s *Sri Aurobindo and the Mother*: ‘Sri Aurobindo’s decision to leave his own body does not invalidate the truth of his teachings.’ I would like to hear, in clear and understandable words, what is meant by ‘Aurobindo’s decision to leave his own body’. Death does not depend on our decision unless we commit suicide. Was this the case with Aurobindo? If so, how did he do it, and how would it be reconcilable with his words (quoted on page 2 of *Mother India*): ‘Death must not be feared, but neither should death or permanent ill-health be invited.’

“Further Prithvi Singh writes, ‘His last act of Grace was to keep his body intact for several days.’ What is the sense of these words? After death the body immediately begins to decay and cannot be kept intact by any act of grace. Was something applied to the body so as to keep it intact for several days?

“Equally un-understandable are Prithvi Singh’s words concerning Aurobindo and the Mother: ‘It is the same

consciousness divided into two for purposes of the play'. The 'same' consciousness cannot be divided into two. This sentence simply makes no sense and no amount of play or *Lila* will add any sense to it.

"I should like to have a lucid reply from you, not one couched in words of mist and clouds."

This reader from abroad is no scoffer and he belongs to the rank of Sri Aurobindo's admirers. His inquiry is of one who is interested in spiritual things and it represents the difficulty and perplexity of many sincere minds both in the West and the East. We may, therefore, take some trouble over the clarification he desires of what he considers puzzling obscurities and we consider to be nothing more than non-expository declarations.

But clarification here must not be supposed to have in view a perfect intellectual lucidity such as is possible in matters with which the human mind has been familiar for centuries. Spiritual things do not belong to the surface of life as lived at present. God is not evident to the ordinary senses with which we function: even our own souls are not to us a certain knowledge. We have instinctive beliefs about them, which to some people are automatically convincing, but as soon as we start thinking and reasoning we find ourselves in what our reader would call "mist and clouds." Of course, the words we use can be either precise or vague, our manner of argument can be pointed or rambling and involved: "mist and clouds" can come from the kind of words we employ as well as from the kind of thoughts that are behind words, and we

should do our best to be clear in these respects, but when the very subject is of a range of being beyond the common we cannot hope for statements absolutely disinfected of the mysterious or even the miraculous.

Even in the realm of modern science we have passed far beyond ordinary lucidity. Not that the ideas of what is called classical or Newtonian physics were in themselves axiomatic: absolute space, for instance—an utter omnipresent void which is yet a substantial stationary entity determining and affecting measurements of physical processes—is hardly a very clear idea. Neither is the force of gravitation which acts instantaneously, requires no medium for its passage and cannot be interfered with by any intervening object. But they seemed to agree roughly with our experience of the man-sized world and with the familiar deliverance of our senses: they thus acquired a spurious lucidity. With the advent of Einstein this lucidity disappeared: a “curved” non-euclidian four-dimensional continuum of fused space and time is “mist and clouds” with quite a vengeance. So too is the world of quanta in which we are asked by Böhr to choose between non-causality in space and time or causality without them! Even the fact that no mechanical model can represent now the ultimate processes of physical Nature strains the understanding immensely.

All this is really as it should be, for when we get down to the infinitesimal or stretch our minds towards the infinite we break out of the world to which we are generally accustomed. The pure mathematician may cope in his

own way with the basic problems of the physical universe, but his way is most abstract and seems to our day-to-day intelligence utterly removed from reality. The pure mathematician himself knows that the extremity of abstraction to which he is driven is due to a tremendous mystery baffling the senses and yielding only a series of provisional algebraical equations of a most complicated kind.

If the physical universe, the more we probe it, becomes so mysterious and challenges both imagination and conception, surely supra-physical or spiritual phenomena cannot be brought before the tribunal of the ordinary outward-going mind. Their nature, processes and laws, their possibilities, actualities and necessities are different from what is familiar to normal human experience. Either there is no spiritual reality and then we need not bother about Sri Aurobindo at all, or else there is such a reality and then we must expect it to exceed our usual imagination and conception even more than do the fields of relativity theory and quantum theory. This does not mean that we can make no intelligible statements about it or that a systematic presentation of aspects of it is impossible. But lucidity or clarity here cannot be of the same type as when we deal with familiar physical or psychological things. It can only apply a logic proper to the subject-matter in hand and show certain ideas as following consistently from certain basic concepts.

Our reader says: "Death does not depend on our decision unless we commit suicide." First of all, the terms

“death” and “suicide” are relevant only to one who knows no state of existence apart from the material body. A Yogi in the full sense is precisely one who has, to say the least, transcended the physical body-formula. Mystical experience brings to light several “sheaths” other than the physical. The Yogi is awake in them at the same time he lives in the latter, and he can at any moment put his body in a state of trance and move out in them. Death, in the common connotation, is to him merely a permanent leaving of the physical sheath so that, unconnected with the subtle sheaths, the physical loses its support and vitality. Inasmuch as this support is lost, there is a death unlike the temporary departures the Yogi usually makes from his body. But inasmuch as the Yogi, even when not making these temporary departures, lives beyond the body and knows an inner independence of it, the terms “death” and “suicide” cannot have for him the meaning ordinarily attached to them. And he certainly has the power to die whenever he wishes: death does depend on his decision. He may not be able to prolong his life indefinitely, but he can indubitably cut it short at any time—either by withdrawing into his subtle sheaths or else by withdrawing beyond all sheaths into the formless Atman and Brahman, the essential and infinite spiritual Self-hood or Being-hood.

As for Sri Aurobindo, he was not only a Yogi in the highest sense known to the past: a *Mukta*, a liberated soul. He was also a Yogi in a new sense by virtue of wide-awake possession of what is called the Supermind. The

Supermind is the creative Truth-Consciousness, the divine harmony of unity in diversity in which the perfect truth of all manifestation resides, both singly and innumerably, as Lord of the universe as well as the universe's in-dwelling Godhead. By the Supermind's integral realisation the mind, the life-force and even the body would become divinised, fulfilling Nature's evolutionary labour and establishing on earth a perfect individual and collective existence manifesting in Time ever-new riches of the inexhaustible Infinite. When Sri Aurobindo passed away, the Supermind was in process of being established in his body. This means an extraordinary power over normal physical nature's activity—a power to keep off disease and ward off death. The absolutely automatic immunity would come only with the total establishment of the Supermind in the body, the absolute transformation or supramentalisation of all bodily functions, but a capacity to sustain and prolong the body indefinitely could be there even before. Whatever signs of age and whatever physical ailments might appear would be because of a sanction of the conscious will in order to meet every difficulty facing human nature and to cope with it by actual acceptance of it: unless this is done there can be no complete evolutionary conquest significant for the race. Whether the final physical difficulty—the death of the form—is met by coming to the verge of death or by going through the whole experience of dying—this is decided according to the need of the hour. Sri Aurobindo decided upon death in the fullest meaning. And when for

the purposes of the supramental manifestation death is accepted it would not be a mere withdrawal, but an acceptance of natural factors of disease so that a real fight with them may take place and by the sacrifice of one body, in which the Supermind is supremely manifesting, a decisive absorption, as it were, occur of the force of death and the way be cleared for the removal of that force's effectiveness from the partner body, the Mother, working with Sri Aurobindo. Then with that partner body as the centre a new life would radiate to all earth.

It is because of these facts that we are told: "Sri Aurobindo's decision to leave his own body does not invalidate the truth of his teachings." And the truth of his teachings is not only the words our reader quotes from him: "Death must not be feared, but neither should death or permanent ill-health be invited." The truth of his teachings is also that for a divine manifestation the Supramental Yoga aims at conquest of bodily deterioration, disease and death just as it aims at conquest of the life-force's incapacity and perversity and the mind's ignorance and egoism. What Sri Aurobindo did to his own body was not the result of a failure on his part nor of an invitation to ill-health and death for their own sakes. It was a momentous act in the drama of the supramental Yoga and various incidents before it and during it show positively its true nature. To realise this, our reader has only to study—among other things—my own article *The Passing of Sri Aurobindo*, Nirodbaran's *Sri Aurobindo: "I am Here! I am Here!"* and "Synergists" *The Debt to Rudra*.

A passage from Nirodbaran may be quoted: "As the disease was taking a bad turn we repeatedly asked him to use his spiritual Force to cure it....But each time we questioned him, we met with an enigmatic silence...It was the memorable 4th December...Sri Aurobindo had totally emerged from the depths and expressed a desire to sit up. In spite of our objections, he insisted. We noticed after a while that all the distressing symptoms had magically vanished and he was once more a healthy person. Then he sat in the chair. The change was so sudden and unexpected that we looked at each other in sheer joy and amazement...Now we ventured to repeat our question: Are you not using your Force to get rid of the disease? 'No!' came the shocking reply. We could not believe our ears and to get a confirmation of our disbelief we asked again. What we heard was as clear and sharp as a sabre-edge. Then we put forth the bold query: 'Why not?...' To this he simply gave the cryptic reply: 'Can't explain; you won't understand.'"

Once the meaning of the supramental Yoga is grasped and Sri Aurobindo's passing seen in the proper light, there is nothing mystifying in Prithvi Singh's sentence: "His last act of Grace was to keep his body intact for several days." The body's remaining absolutely intact for several days under even tropical conditions—and this was certified by several doctors Indian and French—had a manifold purpose, one side of which is Prithvi Singh's statement that Sri Aurobindo wanted all his disciples and followers to have time to come and have the last *darshan*.

We need not enter here into all the sides: the point we are concerned with is simply that such a phenomenon is completely in tune with the superhuman Aurobindonian power. The basis of this power was declared by the Mother when she announced forty-one hours after the "clinical" death: "The funeral of Sri Aurobindo has not taken place today. His body is charged with such a concentration of supramental light that there is no sign of decomposition and the body will be kept lying on his bed so long as it remains intact." It is no use saying, as our reader does, that after death the physical body immediately begins to decay and cannot be kept intact by any act of grace and that if it did not decay something must have been applied to it. Nothing was applied or needed to be applied: what happened happened naturally according to Sri Aurobindo's attainment and will and was no miracle at all from the viewpoint of the Supermind's capacity. But from the viewpoint of the ordinary mind it cannot help looking like a miracle—and that, again, is precisely what we should expect at certain phases of the Supermind's manifestation in a world of limited mind.

We come now to our reader's last puzzle. He feels that it is nonsensical or at least incomprehensible to assert that for the sake of the *lila* or world-play the same consciousness was divided into two—Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. But we are afraid that he is thinking in terms of the *Ahankar* or ego. The ego is the separative individual, a formation of Nature whose very essence is its limitation, its exclusion of others. There cannot be the same ego in

two beings, for that would be a self-contradiction. But the true individual, whose distorted figure in evolving Nature is the ego and which can be realised only by over-passing the ego-cadre, is an inherent aspect of the multi-moded Spirit and is not debarred from a genuine oneness with other individuals and with the universal consciousness. Beyond the universe it has its reality in the Transcendence whose complementary manifested formulations are the universe and the individual. In a general sense we may say that the original Consciousness is a unity-in-multiplicity and that for the purposes of the world-play the same Consciousness is divided into an infinite number of focal points. There is nothing impossible here: in fact it is the only possibility. It is also possible to have a special manifestation of a certain level or cast of divine Consciousness in two forms. We may suggest that the biological division of a species into two sexes is some kind of representation of a twofold basic reality of being. Within each of us, spiritual experience reveals a twofoldness—Purusha and Prakriti, being and becoming, self and nature. In spiritual knowledge the creative world-principle is seen to be biune—Ishwara-Shakti—a two-in-one put forth from the Oneness in which manyness lies implicit. When the Ishwara-Shakti manifests in a special way which constitutes what we call the Avatar manifestation we can have two embodied beings serving as radiating centres of a new creative spiritual force. Intrinsically, therefore, there is no lack of sense in speaking of the same consciousness divided into two for pur-

poses of the play. Whether Sri Aurobindo and the Mother are such a consciousness must be left to spiritual experience or intuitivised intellectual insight. One thing is clear: their joint endeavour is to bring about a radical spiritual change of the world's consciousness, an evolution of mental man into supramental man, a transformation of the human into the divine: they are the luminous parents of a new creation on earth. As such they have all the marks of an Avatar manifestation, a play of the biune Ishwara-Shakti in two physical bodies.

If all that we have said seems still to be merely "words of mist and clouds", then indeed mist and clouds are the very constitution of reality and all words about ultimates are bound to be misty and cloudy! Of course, our statements have been brief, they are not fully elaborated philosophical expositions, yet the leading philosophical ideas necessary are there and to find them lucid the mind must throw itself into a spiritual mood and feel the presence of a Wonder beyond the common actualities and surface concretenesses of physical and psychological life. It is not called upon to renounce reason but to reason about That which is greater and subtler than the categories dictated by sense-experience and by the intellect based on it. Ceasing to make a fetish of a too apparent clarity, we must proceed by the truth of the paradox:

*They see not the clearest,  
Who see all things clear.*

## Vivekananda and Our Spiritual Future

WE who live in this day of India's reawakening to the Yogic secrets of her own past cannot but pay homage to the mighty figure of Vivekananda. Together with his guru, Ramakrishna, he was the most potent early shaper of the resurgence of our national genius. His also was a tremendous impact on the mind of the West. And yet, if we are to work for a complete spiritual fulfilment, we must see that Vivekananda's philosophy, though a golden torch of truth when compared to the conjectural ingenuities of metaphysicians who are not Yogis, falls short of what we may term the integral God-view and world-view. No more inspiring mouth-piece can be found for a particular type of spiritual realisation; but this realisation, necessary and grand as it is, could be overstressed, and Vivekananda did overstress it because of a certain division between his deeply dedicated heart and his powerful yet not untroubled intellect.

The most momentous event in his life was the great act of Ramakrishna, a little before Ramakrishna's own death, which endowed Vivekananda with the divine energy to carry out his mission on earth. "I have become a fakir," cried the Master after imparting to the young disciple by means of a long intimate meditation his own abiding sense and thrill of the divine World-Mother's

presence within and without. The subsequent march of the homeless sannyasi, possessed of the Mother, is part of Indian history. Throughout his life, Vivekananda worshipped the Mother as only a few souls have done; still, his final philosophical word is against the worship of a personal divinity. Surely here is a paradox.

The only explanation is that the paradox is due to his never having succeeded in solving the time-old riddle as he propounded it to himself: "Why under the reign of an almighty and all-loving God of the universe should diabolical things be allowed to remain? Why so much more misery than happiness and so much more wickedness than good?...The question remains to be answered and it cannot be answered." In other words, if God is omnipotent, He is not benevolent, since He has deliberately and not unavoidably caused the cosmic wheel to revolve, and if He is either not omnipotent or benevolent He is not God at all! This dilemma in one form or another always pursued Vivekananda; it is a purely intellectual difficulty dissolved the moment we are humble enough to acknowledge that our puny human standards of benevolence cannot be applied to the Ultimate Being. Indeed our intuitive aspiration after absolute Good, after the final law of righteousness, is indicative, as all feeling-out towards absolutes is, of something in the constitution of the Ultimate Being, but we have to realise that God is not good in our sentimental human way: His is a benevolence which surpasses our notions of it just as much as our notions would exceed those of, say, the most altruistic ape!

Vivekananda, however, never definitely struck upon this truth nor has, for that matter, any intellect which has been too acutely alive to the "still sad music of humanity" and forgotten or at least underrated the beatific harmonies of the superhuman wisdom of God. Has not H. G. Wells, an idealist of our own day, uttered the crashing blasphemy that he would spit in the face of a God who did not utilise His almighty power to lend a fiat to "the Open Conspiracy" by which a "Capitalist-ridden" world is to be saved? The same humanitarian conscience anxious to spare an almighty Maker the responsibility of an imperfect world has compelled Bernard Shaw to conceive his Life Force as a blind stumbling experimenting urge towards perfection. Vivekananda being a true Indian, could not be Wellsian or Shavian and forego the Supreme and the Perfect: he had a gigantic hunger for the immaculate Infinite. But the only way which seemed open to him, in order to reconcile the Perfect with the suffering world and its baffling problems of sin and ignorance, was to turn Shankarite.

This he did without flinching: he called himself an Adwaitin and held Adwaita to be the ultimate both in philosophy and Yoga. Still, he could not shake off the synthetising influence of his guru who followed Bhakti and Jnana with equal fervour. So he accepted the worship of the personal Godhead who creates, preserves and destroys the cosmos, as a preparatory training for the higher ecstasy of the absolute union in which the whole cosmos is blotted out from the Yogi's consciousness.

What he did not see was that the sealed trance of non-duality is only a sort of sublime sleep, and could logically as well as pragmatically mean not the annihilation but merely the oblivion of phenomena.

He, no doubt, endorsed the common-sense of Ramanuja's contention that so long as the soul is aware of Nature and its own individuality it needs must believe in a Lord and Originator of them both. But he unmistakably said that the presence of Nature and the individuality of the soul were a bar to the highest realisation since the One alone truly existed and could not suffer any multiplicity in Its all-consuming Ananda. Confronted with the question how, if the One alone existed, the many had ever come to be, he sought refuge in Shankara's indescribable Maya. Not that he entirely rejected the aspect of the world as Lila—it was indeed the play of Ishwara, the personal divinity, but then Ishwara himself was no more than the most marvellous play of the original Phantasy or Ignorance, the Shankarite Illusion which at once is and is not. The love of Ishwara was, in Vivekananda's eyes, a splendidly cathartic emotion, cleansing the being of much egoism, yet not sufficiently, since the "I" of the lover remained over against the "Thou" of the beloved. But, seizing upon the profound mystery of love by which the lover and the beloved are somehow one though apparently divided, he said that the highest intensity of Bhakti was not different from the non-dual union of Jnana. Unfortunately, he overlooked the other side of the matter—namely, that if this is true the union

of Jnana could never be exclusively non-dual, since Bhakti even in its intensest fusion of "I" and "Thou" implies, as all love must, a difference-in-unity. Thus his very tribute to Bhakti was the result of the pro-Jnana temper of his intellect and based on a philosophical misunderstanding of the ultimate essence of love.

This misunderstanding helped to soothe somewhat the dominant conflict of his spiritual life—the unresting sense of the incompatibility of the One Perfect with the imperfect many. And it is characteristic of him to have made the significant remark that the bhakta must never argue. Love is an emotion which embraces its object blindly and without question. In order, therefore, that the bhakta should reach the climax of his Yoga he should set aside his intellect and yield completely to the psychic urge which does not ask whether God is almighty and also benevolent but adores Him just because He is the Vision Splendid and the Beauty of Ancient Days that is yet ever new. Love, according to Vivekananda, is a maddening intoxication with Beauty: Bhakti must be rapt with the Supreme as Beauty, must take Beauty as an end in itself and ask no questions as to whether it is good or bad, omnipotent or weak.

The truth, however, is that in genuine Bhakti Yoga the attributes of omnipotence and goodness are almost as prominent as that of beauty. God is the most lovely of all objects because His is the superhuman power of an unimaginable love and benevolence. All quibbles about His perfection are vain for the born devotee because they

amount to measuring with little wit the supreme wisdom. But, according to Vivekananda, when his intellect put the personal God on the horns of a dilemma, the horns were fatal to such a God's existence: hence his misconception of the soul of true Bhakti. The same idea is again responsible for the sorry reducing of Devotion to a superb kind of art for art's sake with reference to the Highest, ignoring the final necessity that the Highest should also be an infinite or inconceivable yet real goodness and righteous power. But for Vivekananda the philosopher, a personal Creator could never be that, and if love is to be valuable as a step in spiritual life it must at least forget if not disbelieve that its object is a creative Person. Otherwise, it must go by the board; and in any case Jnana was deemed surer ground inasmuch as it tried to do away with creation and divine personality by means of the theory of Maya—without exactly emptying the baby with the bath-water. The divine Child still remained but in a bit abstract form: it became the divine Childhood, the unageing Bliss, just as the divine Existence became the sole Existence and the divine Knower the pure Consciousness. What is more, the unageing Bliss was conceived as so lost in childlike super-sleep that for it the world ceases, as it were, to exist, and with its cessation the old conflict is permanently dissolved, though yet never satisfactorily accounted for.

This, in general, was Vivekananda's philosophy in which Dualism was regarded as a superficial truth and qualified Monism as a phenomenal edition of the au-

thentic truth which was stark and utter Monism. In all his lectures, this threefold division is either explicit or implicit, and though he admits the provisional efficacy of the first two methods of the soul's progress, he is set like flint against their claim to finality. "*Brahma satyam, jagan mithya*" remains his philosophical motto.

Mark now the inconsistency between this philosophy and his own spiritual career. He was an undeviating worshipper of the Shakti—that is to say, of the same creative Force which his intellect riddled with argument. He was a most zealous devotee of Ramakrishna as an Incarnation—that is to say, of a real manifestation of the Supreme Essence without that Essence's ceasing to be supreme for a moment. For him to look upon the Divine Mother and upon Ramakrishna as illusions to be renounced would have been to make a mockery of his own holiest feelings. And the fact stands that he did not deem them illusions: his every thought was an act of adoration at their feet, every moment of his sadhana was filled and glorified by his acceptance of them as realities. The personal God, sovereign of his being, was the secret of his entire spiritual adventure, whether at Dakshineswar, at Amarnath or at the Parliament of Religions. His whole dynamic Yoga was shaped and guided by this one living motif, this pure psychic realisation. Why, then, did he not preach the name of Kali, the beloved Shyama of his Bengali poems, instead of letting Her be sickled over with the appellation of Maya? Why did he not raise a temple of philosophy to Her instead of

pointing with so splendid a gesture of finality towards Brahman and Atman? Why did he deprecate the personality of the Divine as being a phantom, though the most glorious one, of the illogical mind instead of inspiring men to surrender themselves to the mighty love of Her who gave them birth? Why did he refuse to see in the universe a divine design rather than a futile and blind mechanism which had somehow taken form out of a nothingness of delusion? If he had not thus intellectually refused, he would not have inconsistently preached as he did the gospel of aggressive Hinduism and dynamic spirituality in the same breath in which he declared that the supreme Spirit was eternally passive, eternally aloof from this phantasmagoric universe. If he had spent even half his energy of prophet to humanity as the soldier of the Divine Mother just as he spent so much of his energy of sadhana as Her son and devotee, his philosophy would not have been such a Pyrrhic victory of the trenchant intellect over the illumined soul.

He was right in holding that each finite is necessarily a front and face of the whole Infinite which is hidden behind it and is its Self of self; but the obvious conclusion from it would be that the Infinite possesses, owing to Its omnipotence, the power of appearing divided and imperfect in spite of remaining essentially one and unsullied. To say that It cannot and does not have such a power and yet to believe that somehow the illusion of division and imperfection comes to be, even phenomenally, is to deny the Divine Its omnipotence. Besides, if

spiritual realisation is to be at all real, it must be the soul of the individual that achieves and attains it, so that even when it unites with the Supreme it must still possess a sort of distinct reality. If there is no unity, no basic identity between the two, there can be no union; but if there is no difference there can be no progressive attainment of union either. And if the experience of the attainment is to be real, then the bondage from which the individual soul escapes must also be real—else there is no actual self-liberation, no realisation by the individual of his basic identity with the Highest. But if bondage has a reality, however phenomenal, the sealed trance of so-called exclusive non-duality must be only an oblivious spiritual slumber and no negation of the cosmos, and therefore Nature and the individual soul must always be conceived as necessarily co-existing with the Divine, and the Divine as not a vast void but as an inexplicable yet genuine unity-in-multiplicity; for otherwise there would be no ground of truth in the Ultimate to support and correspond to Its phenomenal manifestation.

It is this ground of truth or perfection that It brings out of Its stability not only to support but also to govern this lower manifestation, which is our world, by a higher manifestation or perfect harmony of what Sri Aurobindo calls Real-Ideas. The Real-Ideas constitute an organised play of supernal archetypes or truths of what is here expressed and worked out by a course of difficult evolution. They are a faultless cosmos in which no division of ignorance is made between the One and the many

contained in It and which guides covertly or overtly this evolutionary mould of itself where the Divine has set up by Its all-might the figure of a great initial nescience as if in a wager with Itself in order to manifest the Truth in the terms of all that begins as its utmost contradiction. In that faultless cosmos there is no absence of the individual soul and its instruments of mind, life and matter. A supreme individual selfhood is there the counterpart of the evolving spark of the Divine that is here our soul; it is measured out and distinguished from its likes by a movement of ideative definition which is the supreme counterpart of what we know here as mind, while the dynamis which sustains the differentiation and interplay of ideative soul-nature is the supreme counterpart of the life-force of our experience, and finally the form taken by the soul's idea-force, that which substantialises distinctions and energy-patterns, is the supreme counterpart of matter. It is the sense of these ideal realities behind everything and of the great wager, that Vivekananda lacked and that sums up the advance made by Sri Aurobindo on the traditional Yogas. But the sense is possible only if the human intellect stops sitting in judgment on the character of God and understands that the evolutionary working out of the full supramental Truth which can make man perfect and solve at length all the jarring riddles of his mortality is the grand aim set up by the Divine.

The Truth is being manifested here by a process and play of possibilities through repeated births, in which

each of us has to behave as if he were free to choose and act; for such indeed seems to be the law of evolution, that the prevision of our supreme selves is to be worked out by the exertion, effort and experiment of our earthly souls, aspiring after the Divine and, without questioning or criticising Its design, calling It down to possess them and all their members, so that body, life and mind may be converted into luminous figures of their own archetypes of Truth. This direct calling down of the Truth, constantly and persistently, with full self-surrender to Its demands is what Sri Aurobindo terms the Integral Yoga by which the very body will also be transformed into an incorruptible vehicle of the immortal Bliss, Consciousness and Power of the Divine—the Divine that is conscious of Its manifestation and capable of holding relations with what It manifests and hence personal in the highest sense of that word—the Divine which is the one yet multiple ground of truth of all that constitutes our humanity and which possesses on the plane of ideal realities the one yet multiple symbol of the perfected human form. Thus even the anthropomorphic conceptions of Shiva and Kali are justified as types of the living divine reality which is to be incarnated in us and to whose infinity of essence, conscious force and beatitude we have to ascend. If, therefore, we are to profit by the example of Vivekananda, we must turn from the rigid mental heights of his Shankarite metaphysics to the psychic depths of his sublimely childlike discipleship. Else we shall fail to avoid the intellectual pitfall which

made his philosophy a voice from the Mayavadin past and we shall miss that in him which bears most luminously on the issues of our spiritual future.

Perhaps the psychic depths of his mighty nature—a nature keenly conscious of the anomalies of existence and aware of the especially hard lot of a spiritual hero destined to revive a fallen nation's soul—perhaps those depths never found tongue with such perfection as in a little-known poignant lyric of his which expresses the brave confidence of the luminous warrior-child of the Supreme Mother and at the same time the tragic puzzlement of one whose intellect discovered not the master-key to life's riddle. A quintessence of the Vivekananda who inherited the world-enlightening mission of Ramakrishna in a mind avid of immurement in the illimitable Formless where no questions arise, this lyric which we may well regard as one of the treasures of English poetry makes the Divine Being utter to him the Wisdom beyond thought:

### THE CUP

*This is your cup—the cup assigned to you  
 From the beginning. Nay, My child, I know  
 How much of that dark drink is your own brew  
 Of fault and passion, ages long ago.  
 In the deep years of yesterday, I knew.*

*This is your road—a painful road and drear.  
 I made the stones that never give you rest.  
 I set your friend in pleasant ways and clear,*

*And he shall come, like you, unto My breast—  
But you, My child, must learn to travel here.*

*This is your task—it has no joy nor grace,  
But 'tis not meant for any other hand,  
And in My universe hath measured place.  
Take it. I do not bid you understand.  
I bid you close your eyes to see My face.*

## **The Mind and Spirit of Our Age: Dilip Kumar Roy's Interviews with Five World-Figures**

*Among the Great*<sup>1</sup>—a book of conversations packed with pleasure and instruction, a book that is in the short compass of 367 pages and at a trifling expense a most fascinating guide to the mind and spirit of our age as manifested in five outstanding personalities! And the fact that it is such a guide is due in no small measure to the author's own personality, the mind and spirit of Dilip Kumar Roy; for it is his own eager search for truth and beauty and goodness that has taken him to the very centre of each great man interviewed, and has done this across various paths so that the word of wisdom when it comes out throws light on a multiplicity of interests, trends, movements, aspects of life. Dilip Kumar Roy himself emerges as an extremely interesting type, many-sided, acutely modern and at the same time steeped in rich traditions, deeply Indian but no less widely international for that. While being a revelation of the core of Romain Rolland, Gandhi, Bertrand Russell, Rabindranath Tagore and Sri Aurobindo, his

<sup>1</sup> Revised and enlarged Popular American Edition—Jaico Publishing House (New York, Bombay, Calcutta)—Price: Rs. 1-12.

book is also a subtle disclosure of his own being—a kind of indirect mental autobiography written with the aid of five world-figures.

I said "five", but though that is the number of great ones conversed with, there are in fact six notable personalities represented. For, the author has added to his already glittering treasury by getting Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan to contribute a nine-paged introduction which gives us a general survey of the field of character and thought covered by the book as well as a glimpse of his own attitude and position. Except for two or three phrases in the third paragraph, with a rather exaggerated and indiscriminative ring as if all the individuals here were equally rishis of the ultimate vision, the introduction is balanced and felicitous. To secure it was no mean part of the inspiration which led Roy beyond the interviews to some extra features, the most precious being a substantial sheaf of letters of Sri Aurobindo's, nearly seventy pages of literary criticism, philosophical discussion, mystical knowledge, socio-political analysis, marked by insight, energy and humour.

### *Romain Rolland*

The order in which the interviews are arranged is not without meaning. Born a musician, Roy begins with Romain Rolland the literary artist who made musical experience his special study. And many utterances that go to the heart of music in particular and art in general

are here recorded. Several striking judgments are also passed on the methods of Indian and European music. In fact, a few flaws of extremism notwithstanding, a more discerning and far-reaching piece of declaration of faith by a great artist who is also a great humanist and idealist would be hard to find anywhere in literature. This is high praise, yet on the whole deserved. The true Rolland stands here, revealed all the more by Roy's sensitive and accurate descriptions of his look and manner; and there is so much clearness of deep thought in the midst of warmth of deep feeling that these conversations of his and the half a dozen letters supplementing them can be regarded as the best rejoinder to those who try to make him out a mushy and gushy thinker. One does not know what to quote out of the beautiful abundance. I particularly liked the discussion about an artist's duty to society and to himself. Rolland says that an artist cannot be impervious to the misery and injustice around him, he should do his bit towards removing them, but never at the sacrifice of his own *métier*. No job can be done better than what one is fitted for: besides, to help humanity one need not always be social-reformist. "Do you think," asks Rolland, "that the creative endeavours of art can't and don't prove a daily succour in our sorrow? A single symphony of Beethoven is certainly worth half a dozen social reforms... The first and paramount duty of the artist and the intellectual is to be true to his inner call and urge—sleeplessly: he must above all keep the lamp burning in the shrine of inner perceptions—and must

create whenever his daemon prompts him. This done, his surplus time and energy he may devote to the betterment of social conditions, as Goethe used to. He served society, but only during lulls in his creative inspiration... A man's duty is not done if he thinks only of his contemporaries—his neighbours: he has to take count of his duties to the Eternal Man who, emerging out of the lowest animality, has climbed obstinately through centuries towards the light. And what constitutes the ransom for the liberation of this Eternal Man in bondage is his conquest of the Spirit. All the efforts of the savant, the thinker and the artist compete for this heroic campaign (campaign in the sense of battling against odds); whoever among them repudiates this obligation—were it even for the sake of altruism—betrays his ultimate mission."

Lest it should be thought that Rolland gives a *carte blanche* to egoism on the artist's part, we must note that for him the true artist is he who never lies on a bed of roses. Rolland agrees with what Tolstoy wrote in a letter to him: "The vindication of the truly artistic vocation lies in the trials and tribulations cheerfully suffered and nobly accepted." But he does not go the whole way with Tolstoy's theory of art. Here a remark of his is worth citing about a point which Gandhi, the next subject of interview in the book, attempts to drive home. Gandhi wants art to be always universal in appeal, to reach the masses and never to need any specialisation, a certain high level of culture, for its appreciation. Rolland is certainly against pretentious high-browism, against

punditism putting on airs, but he cannot for all his passionate admiration of Gandhi share Gandhi's Tolstoyan view that art's supremacy lies in its being not above the heads of peasants. Such a criterion is too rigid, for the artist cannot always keep himself tied to the receptivity of peasants—and his being above common heads does not annul his inward touch with humanity and his contribution to progress. "Humanity," says Rolland, "is always on the march. The intellectual élite are its vanguard, its pioneers, paving the way along which the entire humanity shall pass eventually. It would therefore be wrong to represent the élite as separated from the rank and file because the latter lags behind. And he would be an indifferent leader of the people who would constrain its vanguard to march with the bulk of the army."

### *Gandhi*

The interviews with Gandhi (the last in an ominous atmosphere on the eve of the shots that rang round the world) are no whit inferior as a document of personality, though their mental value is not as high. They appropriately follow on the heels of that with Rolland because next to being a natural artist Roy was a lover of India when he set out on his life's odyssey. In the minds of many people during the twenties and thirties Gandhi was a symbol of India, and our author's sympathy with him came all the easier for the latter's keen enjoyment of

music. The "Mahatma" is shown as holding that India's music is of her very essence, and it is frequently that he asks Roy to sing to him. About painting, however, he is quite cold—and on all art that strikes him as not the heart's immediate outflow but as going in frequently for complex values he is rather severe. But what constitutes the worth of his presence in the book is not his attitude towards art: the man of action, the man of ethical askesis—that is the real Gandhi. While speaking even of music he brings us face to face with this basic substance of himself. "How well I remember," he says in one place, "the joy and comfort that music used to give me when I was ailing in a South African hospital. I was then recovering from the hurts I had received at the hands of some roughs who had been engaged to cripple me—thanks to the success of my 'Passive Resistance Campaign.' At my request the daughter of a friend of mine used, very often, to sing to me the famous hymn, *Lead Kindly Light!* And how it acted like a healing balm invariably." The heroic "experiment with truth" stands out here, while the mention of *Lead Kindly Light!* confirms the trait which his predilection for devotional songs from among the wealth of Indian music puts forward in the interviews time and again: his religious fervour.

But though his religious fervour is considerable and his life shorn of evil hungers by a strong-willed self-discipline, he is as little the mystic as the philosopher. Just as the philosophical intellect's impartial multi-mooded questing is absent in him, the direct illumination

of the ecstatic or the contemplative—leading to Mahatma-hood in the original sense of union with the Infinite Being—is also not his. But that scarcely implies that he was not in his own sphere a salutary force in India. He was salutary both because he was straight and strong and because he had a childlike simplicity combined with a twinkling puckish humour. Not to know Gandhi's laughter is not to know him at all. Roy supplies us in four and a half pages with a portrayal of Gandhi's laughter as well as of his agility in political discussion—"the frail athlete", he is called in a priceless phrase—and of his high moral seriousness, a portrayal that is the work of a remarkable artist in character-nuances. A widely human figure steps out of these pages—and that wide humanity tends to make even his prejudice against what Rolland terms the world's vanguard a moving limitation. There will, perhaps, be some to doubt if there is actually a limitation here and for them there will be a convincing sentence pronounced on a part of Rollandian, Tagorean and Aurobindonian aims when Gandhi dogmatically declares: "I maintain that the profoundest utterances of man in every great philosophy or religion as in every great art must appeal equally to all. I cannot for the life of me see much in any specialisation which must mean nothing to the vast multitude. Its only tangible effect seems to be that it gives a swelled head to a few and sows aversion and contempt where there should be sympathy and understanding."

*Bertrand Russell*

I cannot help feeling that to apply this stricture to even a part of Rollandian, Tagorean and Aurobindonian aims is really not to understand their depths—and to take apparent and outward humanitarianism as the only one, the sole true one. A non-understanding no less of a part of these aims and, into the bargain, that of Gandhism itself is Bertrand Russell's "limpid crystalline thought." He is the pure scientific intellect—not standing quite beyond the voice of feeling and whatever is connected with religion but remaining uncoloured by them in its judgments and guiding our nature by its unswerving impersonal regard for demonstrable fact. He is the emblem, in Roy's own life, of the doubting critical outward-shining mentality the latter developed during his tour in Europe. A mentality not to be brushed aside, for there is a lot of stale and cankering superstition, a lot of stifling emotional hot air, which the Russelian open-eyedness can dissipate with profit. For Russell is not merely a destroyer; he has several good things to offer—a sane and frank attitude towards sex, for instance. He is particularly acid about the Roman Catholic Church's ban on birth-control and divorce. He regrets also Gandhi's sympathy with such a ban just as he regrets the belief Gandhi shares, with many great men, in the soul and God. He offers us science as a mighty improver of the human mind by rendering it impervious to religious "irrationalism" and by improving the racial stock through

sterilisation of the mentally unfit as well as through judicious birth-control. It is to be supposed that the racial stock might be improved by the means Russell advocates, but his stern censure of religious experience is rather indiscriminate. He can see nothing sound in mysticism: when Roy speaks of mystics preaching lofty principles from their illuminations and ecstasies, he retorts: "I believe in ecstasies as data of definite experience, but when they imply vision of the highest reality I cannot accept them; for, the lofty principles you speak of are by no means the results of these mystic illuminations. As a matter of fact such ecstasies render the mystics distinctly self-centred and selfish. Through such transports they become more and more subjective and get more and more loth to lead a healthy life of varied activities and lose interest in things for themselves. Consequently, their joys tend to become more and more similar to the joys of the voluptuary or the drunkard." To redress the apparent lopsidedness a statement of this kind argues in Russell, Roy opines that it is just a conversational emphasis and that Russell does not really leave the boons of mysticism out of the picture. I am afraid they are left out; for to admit, as Russell does, that equal in value to the scientific pursuit of knowledge are the creation and enjoyment of beauty, the joy of life and human affection, is merely to give a place to the non-intellectual sides of us, not to afford a *locus standi* to religion and mysticism. No true concession is made even by the fine declaration: "The organised

life of the community is necessary, but it is necessary as a mechanism, not something to be valued on its own account. What is of most value in human life is more analogous to what all the great religious teachers have spoken of." For, what Russell has in mind, as his book *Religion and Science* proves, are the equanimity and compassion, the radiance and healing atmosphere which the master-mystics speak of but which, according to him, are attainable without mysticism and should be so attained rather than in conjunction with an erroneous belief and an aberrant psychology. To those who have even an inkling of true mystical experience of any type it would be absurd to imply that Buddha's supreme equanimity and compassion are possible without his ego-annulling and desire-destroying Nirvana or Rama-krishna's intensely radiant nature and healing atmosphere can be acquired without his rapturous realisation of the omnipresent Divine Mother. Qualities of the soul reach their acmes only through the soul's awakening to its cosmic and transcendent source. But Russell's failure to assess rightly the validity and worth of spiritual experience must not blind us to the noble, acute, healthy sagacity he is shown by Roy to be commanding in many respects on the outer tangible plane.

Before I pass to the author's fruitful contact with Tagore I must pause a moment to quote from Radhakrishnan's introduction a remark apropos Russell. While appreciating the latter's unmuddled courage and humanitarian concern, Radhakrishnan applies a fine intuitive touch-

stone to the theory of naturalistic evolution which denies the supra-physical soul, the spark of the Divine Spirit: "Russell does not seem to realise that the human individual who can sit in judgment on the universe, who has the intelligence to know that his life is but a brief episode in the history of this planet, who has developed a conscience which protests against the waste and want of the world is not a mere phenomenon among phenomena, an object among objects." I dare say a sceptical and analytic intellect like Russell could give a *riposte* to this subtle thrust—but the *riposte* would be, in any way, effective on the abstract plane, not on the plane of the whole being with its many dimensions, its in-dwelling magnitudes and overbrooding mysteries. A semi-poetic logic is here, far more satisfying and convincing than any pronouncement of that merely intellectual argumentation to which there can be no end.

*Rabindranath Tagore*

This is not to undervalue the intellect—it is to attune it to the integral personality, ponderable and imponderable. The intellect must have a definite play: else we sink mostly into rank vitalism and uncurbed emotionalism and invite the fanatic and the obscurantist more than the seer. Its importance is implicit in the conversations with Tagore and Sri Aurobindo. The one is a skilful thinker at the same time that he is an intuitive poet and the other a profound philosopher plus an illumined Yogi and an ins-

pired bard. Towards Tagore, Roy is drawn by the seeker in him of the Ideal through love and beauty. That seeker is affined to the artistic aspirant who went to Rolland—but with one difference. What drew him to the great Frenchman was something that was in a struggle and trying to break forth and expand, the great Frenchman was himself a fighter, he crusaded for a rare vision that made him lonely, his triumphs and exultations were plucked all the while from a wrestling with dark forces. The wrestling sharpened both his artistic insight and his heart's desire but prevented his full growth. Tagore has a calmer and brighter atmosphere, a less wounded exquisiteness of being, a certain happy poise, some actualised neighbouring of the Ideal—but it is a sort of natural neighbouring and is thus not quite aware of the rigours as distinguished from the graces of art, while it is bathed more than Rolland's edged heroism in sweetness and light. Tagore was a finer artist and his inner self too had a finer fulfilment—though Rolland strikes us as having had possibilities of an inner realisation beyond Tagore's possibilities, which yet fell short of their promise and left him less harmonised. Tagore's talk has not, except in a passage at the end, the burning piercing note—it has a certain degree of assured radiance. Just a faint *soupc̄on* of self-complacence too is there in a couple of minor places, as if the consummate artist in him as well as the intuitive depth finding voice in his art were not always worthily accompanied by the rest of the consciousness. On the whole, however, the talks are

indeed attractive—with a half-humorous personal streak running in and out of serious and beautiful reflection. The poet does not dwell exclusively on his semi-mystical pursuit of the Ideal through love and beauty; he introduces a very human element by remembering his own early shy encounters with romance and by discussing love and beauty in the life of man and woman. He points out the difference between the needs in man's nature and those in woman's. He is not anti-feminist, wanting woman to remain shackled and inferior nor is he in favour of old cramping customs; Russell has a good word for Tagore's progressiveness and, as shown by the excerpt from a letter to Dilip Kumar Roy in the Foreword which adorned the original Indian edition of the book but which has unaccountably been dropped from this American one, Havelock Ellis who has done champion service in breaking ancient taboos agrees with Tagore's conception of man's and woman's offices. Not man's competitor but his complement: this is Tagore's formula for woman. "Woman's function", he says with a poet's flair for simile, "works passively, subterraneously, like the roots of a tree, while man's fulfilment consists in spreading himself out like branches, through growth, adventure and activity. But in order that his activity may find fruition in lasting contributions to our civilisation, his roots must be strongly embedded in firm soil, otherwise his growth becomes top-heavy." A still more suggestive remark soon follows: "Just as in the physical plane the germ of man works in the background while woman carries it within her and

nurses it into life, so in the mental plane the inspiration of woman must first implant its seed in man's subconscious in order that his creative impulses may bear fruit...It is not for nothing that man turns with relief to her in the monotonous round of his activities and is drawn to her as iron to magnet. Her grace and charm and sweetness are necessary to our very existence." Elucidating the dissimilarity of the two sexes, Tagore declares that the personal and the social are more vividly real to the feminine nature, the masculine is inclined more towards impersonality and is in its dealing with the world more utilitarian than humanly intimate and understanding. Another difference, according to Tagore, manifests itself in the deeper spiritual field: man quests for freedom, a rising above earth and embodiment, a flight to the Absolute, whereas woman does not feel earth to be a bondage and she cannot give up the beautiful significance of form for the bare and the formless.

Much of all this is, in the main, true, so far as the ordinary disposition of life is concerned. But there is something also to be said for the modern tendency, often crude and superficial though it may be, to equalise the sexes; for, behind it is a pressure towards climbing beyond the outward differentiations, since the fundamental human nature is the same and escape the sex-limits and holds every sort of potentiality and commands the power of a varied function. In essence this pressure is a highly evolutionary factor. We tend overmuch to see man and woman in relation to each other and in the way

their natures manifest commonly on the mental, vital, physical levels. What we often forget is that either is an expression ultimately of a soul, a spiritual self, and that the destiny of both is not so much in relation to each other as in relation to the single Godhead they have to evolve side by side and co-operatively on earth. Transcendent of the sex-differentiations and of the physical-vital-mental formula is the more-than-human nature they bring as their basis: considered in the light of that nature, their finest development would appear to lie in a large equality of status and function, with yet a subtle variety of tone and mould and gesture and interaction in that nature's outflowering.

Even as things are in the present stage of our evolution, Tagore seems to slip from the right track when, touching upon the deeper spiritual field to which we have access, he says that the wife of Buddha could not have renounced him for the Infinite as Buddha renounced her. The formless Nirvana may not generally be suited to a woman's aspiration and in that sense she cannot leave her mate and seek the Infinite; yet without violating her *swabhava* she can surely pass beyond her human attachments and pursue the Eternal as a personal Being who, while infinitely exceeding earth, does not in the least disdain it. In the realm of spirituality there is not only Buddha as a type: there is also Mirabai. And the two types are not strictly distributed between the sexes. Tagore himself of the *Gitanjali*-lyrics has the bhakta's disposition. As ardent a bhakta as the woman Mirabai

was the man Chaitanya, and Buddhism had nuns as well as monks. Incline as it frequently may in one or the other direction exclusively, the psyche in either sex is two-moded.

*Sri Aurobindo*

This fact gives us a clue to what may be termed the complete spiritual aim for us—inner liberation from earth and from embodiment together with transformation and fulfilment of both, *mukti* in the impersonal Infinite together with ascension to the personal God and incarnation of His powers and purposes in our total nature. That would imply a consummating of all that is truly valuable and creative in Rolland, Gandhi, Tagore and also Russell where his attack on mystical isolation and other-worldliness is concerned, no less than the bringing of a value and creativity beyond any of their achievements or their dreams. And it is just because of discerning such a synthesis of the essential best in them and at the same time an integrality and harmony vastly superior to what they offer that Dilip Kumar Roy reaches his goal at the feet of Sri Aurobindo the Yogi of the dynamic divinisation of the human, the Yogi who is also a poet, a philosopher, a social thinker, a man of idealistic action. Naturally the interviews with which the book closes become its climax, providing the cream of its significance. Here the profoundest feelings and desires of the author are laid before us, his life's various movements and the

curves of his character find their intimate record. He opens his heart and mind to Sri Aurobindo and in return Sri Aurobindo pours the rich stream of his illumination, buoying him up, turning him towards the secrets of the Supreme, sweeping around him and into him the myriad currents of his wisdom born of God-realisation. There is conveyed to us, thanks to the inspired "reportage", both the Master's moving humanness and something of his yogic personality's perfume and aura. Sri Aurobindo's "Everlasting Yea" to the challenge of earth-evolution dispels the misapprehension with which the author approached Yoga. "I was scared," writes Roy, "by what I thought Yoga had in store for its devotees: a life of awful asceticism, desiccating discipline and withering solitude, all of which meant for me an utter stultification of life." Meeting Sri Aurobindo he was convinced that far from stultifying life and, with it, art, the Integral Yoga taught at Pondicherry would heighten and fulfil everything.

It must have been novel indeed to find a Yogi who could write in a book of his that the rationalistic Materialism which characterised nineteenth-century Europe had an indispensable utility both in counteracting the spiritual habit of recoiling from the earth and in training the human intellect to a clear austerity without which in the past a real nucleus of spiritual truth had been encrusted with such an accretion of perverting superstitions and dogmas that all advance in true knowledge was rendered impossible. He is as little perturbed by the materialistic

mind as he is taken in by it. When Roy puts a certain idea in a rather sceptical manner and adds, "it may be that I have been somewhat Westernised," the Master smiles and, remembering his fourteen years of education in England from the age of seven, remarks: "You may have heard that I too happen to know a thing or two about the West and Westernisation." And he proceeds to flay as forthrightly the defects of the materialists as he has praised their merits: "I know their mentality well with its throw-away-the-baby-too-with-the-bathwater attitude. Since mountebanks use trickery to exploit the supra-physical phenomena, therefore—they will argue—all such phenomena are frauds and stagecraft." Having himself been—as he admits—an agnostic at one time, it is extremely interesting to read what he writes in a letter to our author about the demand for the Divine as a concrete certitude, quite as concrete as any physical phenomenon caught by the senses: "Certainly, the Divine must be such a certitude not only as concrete but more concrete than anything sensed by eye or ear or touch in the world of Matter; but it is a certitude not of mental thought but of essential experience. When the Peace of God descends on you, when the *Ananda* rushes on you like a sea, when you are driven like a leaf before the wind by the breath of the Divine Force, when Love flows out from you on all creation, when Divine Knowledge floods you with a light which illuminates and transforms in a moment all that was dark, sorrowful and

obscure, when all that is becomes part of the One Reality, when it is all around you felt at once by the spiritual contact, by the inner vision, by the illumined seeing thought, by the vital sensation and even by the very physical sense, when everywhere you see, hear, touch only the Divine, then you can much less doubt it or deny it than you can deny or doubt daylight or air or the sun in heaven—for of all these physical things you cannot be sure that they are what your senses represent them to be; but in the concrete experience of the Divine, doubt is impossible.”

It is, of course, by Yoga that this experience arrives at its full intensity: Sri Aurobindo sets no great store by mere religiosity and dogmatic belief, though he never discounts faith as a staff until the realisation comes in our very underlying substance and essence. Even while showing the necessity of faith he does not discourage the sincerely questioning mind, nor does he wish to be dictatorial in any way. The main thing is not to bend the mind by force but to render it possible for the true soul, the inmost psychic being, to emerge and bring its spontaneous contact with the Divine as a constant factor in the evolution of the Divine in the earth-formula. The full evolution would mean the descent of what Sri Aurobindo terms the Supermind, the Truth-consciousness from which all perfection, not excluding the physical body's, can result for us but which no one in the past has securely possessed or brought into manifestation and for whose rapid descent for mankind Sri Aurobindo

went into so-called "retirement", leaving his co-worker the Mother in direct day-to-day charge of the Yogic development of his disciples. In this connection some of Roy's questions and Sri Aurobindo's answers are of the utmost value at present when the world seems so gloomed over with terrible possibilities and the *Asura* or Titan is on the march and Sri Aurobindo has withdrawn from his physical body. Apropos a couple of letters in which the Master had written that he was not in the least dis-couraged by the steady trend from bad to worse in the world-situation since it was temporary and he knew and had experienced hundreds of times that behind the blackest darkness there lay for one who was a divine instrument the light of God's victory, Roy shoots out the query: "Have you any direct evidence in favour of such a prognosis?" In the author's own words:

"A smile edged his lips. He held my eyes for a few seconds without replying, then said: 'I have'.

"Do I understand that your Supramental means business after all—I mean by coming down at long last for us humans?"

"His smile now broadened into laughter... 'Do I understand,' I pursued again after the laughter had subsided, 'that the conquest of the Asuric forces will usher in the Supramental Descent?'

"'Not in itself,' he said with a far-away look, 'but it will create conditions for the Descent to become a possibility.'

"There was something in his tone and look which

stirred a chord deep down in me. I hesitated for a little and then hazarded the question, just to have the answer from his lips, was it? I do not know. All I know is that something irresistible impelled me to it.

“‘Is your real work this invocation of the Supramental?’

“‘Yes,’ he replied, very simply, ‘I have come for that.’

“And I was laughing with him, arguing with him, examining his point of view...because he had given me the right by calling me ‘a friend and a son’, in his infinite compassion! The remorse of Arjuna in the Gita recurred to me, inevitably:

*Oft I addressed thee as a human mate  
And laughed with thee—failing to apprehend  
Thine infinite greatness, sharing with thee my seat  
Or couch—by right of love for thee as friend:  
For all such errors of irreverence  
Thy forgiveness I implore in penitence.”*

What are we to think? An Avatar’s presence invades us—and with a wonderful promise. If Sri Aurobindo’s mission from on high is to call down the Supermind and establish a radical and revolutionary spiritual change on earth, not only will the prevailing chaos and corruption terminate in the near future but also the termination will be aided by the very event which seems to a superficial view so heart-shattering—his departure from the material scene. That departure cannot have been by any compulsion: it must have been of free choice, a strategic

sacrifice of his own body to help in some occult way his work of integral earth-transformation!

Dilip Kumar Roy could not have come to a close with a subtler touch. A uniquely large and far-seeing, just and careful and profound consciousness which is an undefeatable "secret splendour" behind its human face is the Sri Aurobindo that emerges from Roy's delineation. Remark after acute and satisfying remark—with an indefinable authority of ultimate truth—cries out for quotation; but there is no space here to do full justice to the interviews and to the letters packed between them. One gets absolutely fascinated by a man who is so much at home in a hundred matters — bringing to each a penetrating word. Among the letters, those treating of poetic values, Frank Harris and Shaw, Anatole France, European philosophy, art and spirituality, the inner meaning of the war with Hitler are perhaps the finest. If not anything else, *Among the Great* is worth buying for these discourses.

Roy is nothing but generous in his gifts to the reading public. Besides these epistolary masterpieces and the precious documents from Rolland elsewhere, he has included in the book beautiful English renderings of the many Bengali or Hindi songs he had sung to his friends. And the Aurobindonian letters he has interspersed with certain pages of correspondence by an English friend of his, Ronald Nixon, erstwhile professor of philosophy at Lucknow, at present practising Yoga in Almora under the name of Krishna Prem. Those pages

are apt not only because Sri Aurobindo comments on Krishna Prem's ideas but also because it was through the pointing finger of this Indianised Westerner that Dilip Kumar Roy the Westernised Indian first turned his eyes towards Sri Aurobindo who is the perfect synthesis of East and West. And they are excellent writing, too! It is impossible to thank enough our wanderer among great men for the opulence he has collected for us. But let us not forget that he is no mere collector: himself a creative artist with a sensitive style, the greatnesses in whose midst he has moved are—with the exception of Sri Aurobindo who gets clean out of the cadre of merely human greatness—far from quite overshadowing his own presence and stature.

